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"The Red House Murder"

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By A. A. Milne

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Everybody's

NUMBER TWO AUGUST, 1921 VOLUME XLV

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

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Suppose you, a girl, a lawyer, were called upon to appear in court and prosecute your father and your lover? Would you do it?

"Desert Justice"

A Complete Novel

By Honoré Willsie

Mrs. Willsie is to-day the foremost writer of Western stories. Her books sell by hundreds of thousands. Hereafter her short stories and serials will appear in EVERYBODY'S. The first, "Desert Justice," in

September *Everybody's*

Out August 15th

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The September *Everybody's*

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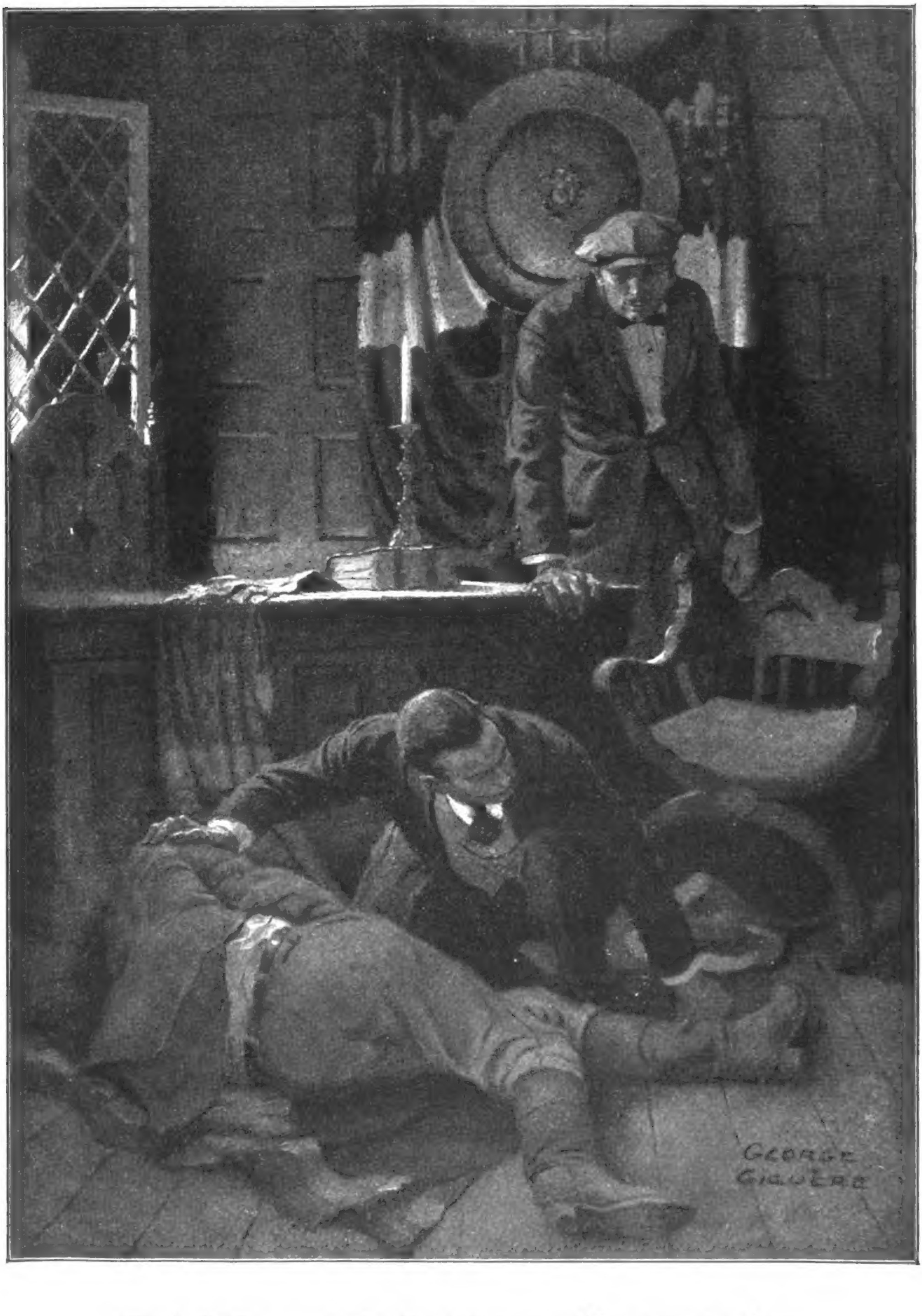
GEORGE GIGUERE

"Thank God," he murmured and let the body go. "Who is it?" said Anthony. "Robert Ablett." "Oh," said Anthony, "I thought his name was Mark."

The Red House Murder

All of us have the Sleuth-urge, the desire to solve crime mysteries. Mr. Milne confesses to it and that's why we have this novel. He thought, as he says, of a good way to commit a murder and there followed this story of mystery, thrills, humor and a detective new to fiction

By A. A. Milne

Illustrations by George Giguère

IN THE drowsy heat of the summer afternoon The Red House was taking its siesta. There was a lazy murmur of bees in the flower-borders, a gentle cooing of pigeons in the tops of the elms. From distant lawns came the whirr of a mowing-machine, that most restful of all country sounds; making ease the sweeter in that it is taken while others are working.

It was the hour when even those whose business it is to attend to the wants of others have a moment or two for themselves. In the housekeeper's room Audrey Stevens, the pretty parlor-maid, retrimmed her best hat, and talked idly to her aunt, the cook-housekeeper of Mr. Mark Ablett's bachelor home.

"Funny thing that about Mr. Mark's brother. Fancy not seeing your brother for fifteen years," she said.

"As I told you all this morning," said her aunt, "I've been here five years, and never heard of a brother. I could say that before everybody if I was going to die to-morrow. There's been no brother here while I've been here."

"You could have knocked me down with a feather when he spoke about him at breakfast this morning. I didn't hear what went before, naturally, but they was all talking about the brother when I went in—now what was it I went in for—hot milk, was it, or toast—well, they was all talking and Mr. Mark turns to me, and says—you know his way—'Stevens,' he says, 'my brother is coming to see me this afternoon; I'm expecting him about three,' he says. 'Show him into the office,' he says, just like that. 'Yes, sir,' I says quite quietly; but I was never so surprised in my life, not knowing he had a brother. 'My brother from Australia,' he says—there, I'd forgotten that. From Australia."

"Well, he may have been in Australia," said Mrs. Stevens judicially; "I can't say for that, not knowing the contrary; but what I do say is he's never been here. Not while I've been here, and that's five years."

"Well, but, auntie, he hasn't been here for fifteen years. I heard Mr. Mark telling Mr. Cayley. 'Fifteen years,' he says, Mr. Cayley having asked him when his brother was last in England. Mr. Cayley knew of him, I heard him telling Mr. Beverley, but didn't know when he was last in England—see?—so that's why he asked Mr. Mark."

"I'm not saying anything about fifteen years, Audrey. I can only speak for what I know, and that's five years Whitsuntide. I can take my oath he's not set foot in the house since five years Whitsuntide. And if he's been in Australia, as you say, well, I dare say he's had his reasons."

"What reasons?" said Audrey lightly.

"Never mind what reasons. Being in the place of a mother to you, since your poor mother died, I say this, Audrey—when a gentleman goes to Australia, he has his reasons. And when he stays in Australia, fifteen years as Mr. Mark says, and as I know for myself five years, he has his reasons. And a respectably brought-up girl doesn't ask what reasons."

"Got into trouble, I suppose," said Audrey carelessly. "They were saying at breakfast he'd been a wild one. Debts. I'm glad my Joe isn't like that. He's got fifteen pounds in the post-office savings bank. Did I tell you?"

But there was not to be any more talk of Joe Turner that afternoon. The ringing of a bell brought Audrey to her feet—no longer Audrey, but now Stevens. She arranged her cap in front of the glass.

"There, that's the front door," she said. "That's him. 'Show him into the office,' said Mr. Mark. I suppose he doesn't want the other ladies and gentlemen to see him. Well, they're all out at their golf, anyhow. Wonder if he's going to stay. P'raps he's brought back a lot of gold from Australia. I might hear something about Australia, because if *anybody* can get gold there, then I don't say but what Joe and I——"

"Now, now, get on, Audrey."

"Just going, darling."

TO ANY one who had just walked down the drive in the August sun, the open door of The Red House revealed a delightfully inviting hall, of which even the mere sight was cooling. It was a big low-roofed, oak-beamed place, with cream-washed walls and diamond-paned windows, blue-curtained. On right and left were doors leading into other living-rooms, but on the side which faced you as you came in were windows again, looking on to a small grass court, and from open windows to open windows, such air as there was played gently. The staircase went up in broad, low steps along the right-hand wall, and, turning to the left, led you along a gallery, which ran across the width of the hall, to your bedroom. That is, if you were going to stay the night. Mr. Robert Ablett's intentions in this matter were as yet unknown.

As Audrey came across the hall she gave a little start as she saw Mr. Cayley suddenly, sitting unobtrusively in a seat beneath one of the front windows, reading. No reason why he shouldn't be there; certainly a much cooler place than the golf-links on such a day; but somehow there was a deserted air about the house that afternoon, as if all the guests were outside, or (perhaps the wisest place of all) up in their bedrooms, sleeping. Mr. Cayley, the master's cousin, was a surprise; and, having given a little exclamation as she came suddenly upon him she blushed and said, "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir, I didn't see you at first," and he looked up from his book and smiled at her. "Such a gentleman, Mr. Cayley," she thought to herself as she went on, and wondered what the master would do without him. If this brother, for instance, had to be bundled back to Australia it was Mr. Cayley who would do most of the bundling.

"So this is Mr. Robert," said Audrey to herself, as she came in sight of the visitor.

She told her aunt afterward that she would have known him anywhere for Mr. Mark's brother, but she would have said that of anybody who had claimed to be Mr. Robert. The likeness was not so obvious as that. This man was much the same height as Mark, and had much the same shaped head. He was also blessed with the same rather long-pointed nose; a family feature, which (as Audrey had observed on her ladyship's visits to The Red House) had not even had the grace to spare Mr. Mark's sister. But there the resemblance ended. Dapper little Mark, with his neat pointed beard and his carefully curled mustache; with his quick-darting eyes, always moving from one to the other of any company he was in, to register one more smile to his credit when he had said a good thing, one more expectant look when he was only waiting his turn to say it; he was a very different man from this rough-looking, clean-shaven Colonial, staring at her so loweringly.

"I want to see Mr. Mark Ablett," he growled. It sounded almost like a threat.

Audrey smiled reassuringly at him. She had a smile for everybody.

"Yes, sir. He is expecting you, if you will come this way."

"Oh! So you know who I am, eh?"

"Mr. Robert Ablett?"

"Aye, that's right. So he's expecting me, eh? He'll be glad to see me, eh?"

"If you will come this way, sir," said Audrey primly.

She went to the second door on the left, and opened it.

"Mr. Robert Ab—" she began, and then broke off. The room was empty. She turned to the man behind her. "If you will sit down, sir, I will find the master. I know he's in, because he told me that you were coming this afternoon."

"Oh!" He looked round the room. "What d'you call this place, eh?"

"The office, sir."

"The office?"

"The room where the master works, sir."

"Works, eh? That's new. Didn't know he'd ever done a stroke of work in his life."

"Where he *writes*, sir," said Audrey with dignity. The fact that Mr. Mark "wrote," though nobody knew what, was a matter of pride in the housekeeper's room.

"Not well-dressed enough for the drawing-room, eh?"

"I will tell the master you are here, sir," said Audrey decisively.

She closed the door and left him there.

Well! Here was something to tell auntie! Her mind was busy at once, going over all the things which he had said to her and she had said to him (quiet-like.) "Directly I saw him I said to myself—'Why, you could have knocked me over with a feather.' " Feathers, indeed, were a perpetual menace to Audrey.

However, the immediate business was to find the master. She walked across the hall to the library, glanced in, came back a little uncertainly, and stood in front of Cayley.

"If you please, sir," she said in a low, respectful voice, "can you tell me where the master is? It's Mr. Robert called."

"What?" said Cayley, looking up from his book. "Who?"

Audrey repeated her question.

"I don't know. Isn't he in the office? He was up at the Temple after lunch. I don't know where he is now."

"Thank you, sir. I will go up to the Temple."

Cayley returned to his book.

"The Temple" was a brick summer-house, in the gardens at the back of the house, about three hundred yards away. Here Mark meditated sometimes, before retiring to "the office" to put his thoughts upon paper. The thoughts were not of any great value; moreover, they were given off at the dinner-table more often than they got on to paper, and got on to paper more often than they got into print. But that did not prevent the master of The Red House from being a little pained when a visitor treated the Temple carelessly, as if it had been erected for the ordinary purposes of flirtation and cigarette-smoking. There had been an occasion when two of his guests had been found playing fives in it. Mark had said nothing at the time, save to ask (with a little less than his usual point) whether they couldn't find anywhere else for their game, but the offenders were never asked to The Red House again.

Audrey walked slowly up to The Temple looked in and walked slowly back again. All that walk for nothing. Perhaps the master was upstairs in his room. "Not well-dressed enough for the drawing-room." "Well, now, auntie, would *you* like any one in your drawing-room with a red handkerchief round his neck and great big dusty boots, and—?" Listen! One of the men shooting rabbits. Auntie was partial to a nice rabbit, and onion sauce. How hot it was; she wouldn't say "no" to a cup of tea. Well, one thing, Mr. Robert wasn't staying the night; he hadn't any luggage. Of course, Mr. Mark could lend him things; they were the same size. She would have known him anywhere for Mr. Mark's brother.

SHE came into the house. As she passed the housekeeper's room on her way to the hall, the door opened suddenly, and a rather frightened face looked out.

"Hallo, Aud," said Elsie. "It's Audrey," she said, turning into the room.

"Come in, Audrey," called Mrs. Stevens.

"What's up?" said Audrey, entering.

"Oh, my dear, you gave me such a turn. Where have you been?"

"Up to the Temple."

"Did you hear anything?"

"Hear what?"

"Bangs and explosions and terrible things."

"Oh!" said Audrey, rather relieved. "One of the men shooting rabbits. Why, I said to myself as I came along, 'Auntie's partial to a nice rabbit,' I said, 'and I shouldn't be surprised if——' "

"Rabbits!" said her aunt scornfully. It was inside the house, my girl."

"Straight it was," said Elsie. She was one of the housemaids. "I said to Mrs. Stevens—didn't I, Mrs. Stevens? 'That was in the house,' I said."

Audrey looked at her aunt and then at Elsie.

"Do you think he had a revolver with him?" she said in a hushed voice.

"Who?" said Elsie excitedly.

"That brother of his. From Australia. I said as soon as I set eyes on him, 'You're a bad lot, my man!' That's what I said, Elsie. Even before he spoke to me. Rude! Well, I give you my word."

"If you remember, Audrey, I always said there was no telling about any one from Australia." She lay back in her chair, breathing rapidly. "I wouldn't go out of this room now, not if you paid me a hundred thousand pounds."

"Oh, Mrs. Stevens!" said Elsie, who badly wanted five shillings for a new pair of shoes. "I wouldn't go as far as that, not myself, but——"

"There!" cried Mrs. Stevens, sitting up with a start.

They listened anxiously, the two girls instinctively coming closer to the older woman's chair.

A door was being shaken, kicked, rattled.

"Listen!"

Audrey and Elsie looked at each other with frightened eyes.

They heard a man's voice, loud, angry.

"Open the door!" it was shouting. "Open the door! I say, open the door!"

"Don't open the door!" cried Mrs. Stevens in a panic, as if it was her door which was threatened. "Audrey! Elsie! Don't let him in!"

"Damn it, open the door!" came the voice again.

"We're all going to be murdered in our beds," she quavered. Terrified, the two girls huddled closer, and with an arm round each, Mrs. Stevens sat there, waiting.

WHETHER Mark Ablett was a bore or not depended on the point of view, but it may be said at once that he never bored his company on the subject of his early life. However, stories get about. There is always somebody who knows. It was understood—and this, anyhow, on Mark's own authority—that his father had been a country clergyman. It was said that, as a boy, Mark had attracted the notice and patronage of some rich old spinster of the neighborhood, who had paid for his education, both at school and university. At about the time when he was coming down from Cambridge his father had died, leaving behind him a few debts as a warning to his family, and a reputation for short sermons as an example to his successor. Neither warning nor example seems to have been effective. Mark went to London, with an allowance from his patron, and it is generally agreed made acquaintance with the money-lenders. He was supposed, by his patron and any others who inquired, to be "writing," but what he wrote, other than letters asking for more time to pay, has never been discovered. However, he attended the theatres and music-halls very regularly—no doubt with a view to writing some serious articles on the decadence of the English stage.

Fortunately, from Mark's point of view, his patron died during his third year in London and left him all the money he wanted. From that moment his life loses legendary character and becomes more a matter of history. He settled accounts with the money-lenders, abandoned his crop of wild oats to the harvesting of others, and became in his turn a patron. He patronized the Arts. It was not only usurers who discovered that Mark Ablett no longer wrote for money; editors were now offered free contributions as well as free lunches; publishers were given agreements for an occasional slender volume, in which the author paid all expenses and waived all royalties; promising young painters and poets dined with him; and he even took a theatrical company on tour, playing host and leading man with equal lavishness.

He was not what most people call a snob. A snob has been defined carelessly as a man who loves a lord; and, more carelessly as a mean lover of mean things—which would be a little unkind to the peerage if the first definition were true. Mark had his vanities undoubtedly, but he would sooner have met an actor-manager than an earl; he would have spoken of his friendship with Dante (had that been possible) more glibly than of his friendship with a duke. Call him a snob if you like, but not the worst kind of snob; a hanger-on, but to the skirts of Art, not Society.

His patronage did not stop at the Arts. It also included Matthew Cayley, a small cousin of thirteen, whose circumstances were as limited as had been Mark's own before his patron had rescued him. He sent the Cayley cousin to school and Cambridge. His motives, no doubt, were unworldly enough at first; a mere repaying to his account in the Recording Angel's book of the generosity which had been lavished on himself; a laying-up of treasure in heaven. But it is probable that, as the boy grew up, Mark's designs for his future were based on his own interests as much as those of his cousin, and that a suitably educated Matthew Cayley of twenty-three was felt by him to be a useful property for a man in his position; a man, that is to say, whose vanities left him so little time for his affairs.

Cayley then, at twenty-three, looked after his cousin's affairs. By this time Mark had bought The Red House and the considerable amount of land which went with it. Cayley superintended the necessary staff. His duties, indeed, were many. He was not quite secretary, not quite land-agent, not quite business-adviser, not quite companion, but something of all four. Mark leaned upon him and called him "Cay," objecting quite rightly in the circumstances to the name of Matthew. Cay, he felt, was, above all, dependable; a big, heavy-jawed, solid fellow, who didn't bother you with unnecessary talk—a boon to a man who liked to do most of the talking himself.

Cayley was now twenty-eight, but had all the appearance of forty, which was his patron's age. Spasmodically they entertained a good deal at The Red House, and Mark's preference—call it kindliness or vanity, as you please—was for guests who were not in a position to repay his hospitality. Let us have a look at them as they came down to that breakfast, of which Stevens has already given us a glimpse.

THE first to come down was Major Rumbold, a tall, gray-haired, gray-mustached, silent man, wearing a Norfolk coat and gray flannel trousers, who lived on his retired pay and wrote natural-history articles for the papers. He inspected the dishes on the side-table, decided carefully on kedjeree, and got to work on it. He had passed on to a sausage by the time of the next arrival. This was Bill Beverley, a cheerful young man in white flannel trousers and a blazer.

"Hallo, Major!" he said as he came in. "How's the gout?"

"It isn't gout," said the major gruffly.

"Well, whatever it is."

The major grunted.

"I make a point of being polite at breakfast," said Bill, helping himself largely to porridge. "Most people are so rude. That's why I asked you. But don't tell me if it's a secret. Coffee?" he added, as he poured himself out a cup.

"No, thanks. I never drink till I've finished eating."

"Quite right, Major; it's only manners." He sat down opposite to the major. "Well, we've got a good day for our game. It's going to be hot, but that's where Betty and I score. On the fifth green, your old wound, the one you got in that frontier skirmish in '43, will begin to trouble you; on the eighth your liver, undermined by years of curry, will drop to pieces; on the twelfth——"

"Oh, shut up, you ass!"

"Well, I'm only warning you. Hallo! Good morning, Miss Norris. I was just telling the major what was going to happen to you and him this morning. Do you want any assistance, or do you prefer choosing your own breakfast?"

"Please don't get up," said Miss Norris. "I'll help myself. Good morning, Major." She smiled pleasantly at him.

The major nodded.

"Good morning. Going to be hot."

"As I was telling the major," began Bill, "that's where— Hallo, here's Betty! Morning, Cayley."

Betty Calladine and Cayley had come in together. Betty was the eighteen-year-old daughter of Mrs. John Calladine, widow of the painter, and acting hostess on this occasion for Mark. Ruth Norris took herself seriously as an actress and (on her holidays) seriously as a golfer. She was quite competent as either.

"By the way, the car will be round at ten-thirty," said Cayley, looking up from his letters. "You're lunching there, and driving back directly afterward. Isn't that right?"

"I don't see why we shouldn't have two rounds," said Bill hopefully.

"Much too hot in the afternoon," said the major. "Get back comfortably for tea."

Mark came in. He was generally the last. He greeted them and sat down to toast and tea. Breakfast was not his meal. The others chattered gently while he read his letters.

"Good God!" said Mark suddenly.

There was an instinctive turning of heads toward him.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Norris. Sorry, Betty."

Miss Norris smiled her forgiveness. She often wanted to say it herself, particularly at rehearsals.

"I say, Cay!" He was frowning to himself; annoyed, puzzled. He held up a letter and shook it. "Who do you think this is from?"

Cayley, at the other end of the table, shrugged his shoulders. How could he possibly guess?

"Robert," said Mark.

"Robert?" It was difficult to surprise Cayley. "Well?"

"It's all very well to say 'Well?' like that," said Mark peevishly. "He's coming here this afternoon."

"I thought he was in Australia, or somewhere."

"Of course. So did I." He looked across at Rumbold. "Got any brothers, Major?"

"No."

"Well, take my advice and don't have any."

"Not likely to, now," said the major.

Bill laughed. Miss Norris said politely: "But *you* haven't any brothers, Mr. Ablett?"

"One," said Mark grimly. "If you're back in time you'll see him this afternoon. He'll probably ask you to lend him five pounds. Don't!"

Everybody felt a little uncomfortable.

"I've got a brother," said Bill helpfully, "but I always borrow from *him*."

"Like Robert," said Mark.

"When was he in England last?" asked Cayley.

"About fifteen years ago, wasn't it? You'd have been a boy, of course."

"Yes, I remember seeing him once about then, but I didn't know if he had been back since."

"No." Mark, still obviously upset, returned to his letter.

"Personally," said Bill, "I think relations are a great mistake."

"All the same," said Betty a little daringly, "it must be rather fun having a skeleton in the cupboard."

Mark looked up, frowning.

"If you think it's fun, I'll hand him over to you, Betty. If he's anything like he used to be and like his few letters have been—well, Cay knows."

Cayley shook his head.

"All I knew was that one didn't ask questions about him."

It may have been meant as a hint to any too curious guest not to ask more questions, or a reminder to his host not to talk too freely in front of strangers, although he gave it the sound of a mere statement of fact. At any rate, the subject dropped, to be succeeded by the more fascinating one of the coming foursome. Mrs. Calladine was driving over with the players in order to lunch with an old friend who lived near the links, and Mark and Cayley were remaining at home—on affairs. Apparently "affairs" were now to include a prodigal brother. But that need not make the foursome less enjoyable.

AT ABOUT the time when the major (for whatever reasons) was fluffing his tee-shot at the sixteenth and Mark and his cousin were at their business at the Red House, an attractive gentleman of the name of Antony Gillingham was handing up his ticket at Woodham station and asking the way to the village. Having received directions, he left his bag with the stationmaster and walked off leisurely. He is an important person to this story, so that it is as well we should know something about him before letting him loose in it. Let us stop him at the top of the hill on some excuse and have a good look at him.

The first thing we realize is that he is doing more of the looking than we are. Above a clean-cut, clean-shaven face, of the type usually associated with the Navy, he carries a pair of gray eyes which seem to be absorbing every detail of our person. To strangers this look is almost alarming at first, until they discover that his mind is very often elsewhere; that he has, so to speak, left his eyes on guard while he himself follows a train of thought in another direction. Many people do this, of course; when, for instance, they are talking to one person and trying to listen to another; but their eyes betray them. Antony's never did.

He had seen a good deal of the world with those eyes, though never as a sailor. When at the age of twenty-one he came into his mother's money, four hundred pounds a year, old Gillingham looked up from *The Stock-breeders' Gazette* to ask him what he was going to do.

"See the world," said Antony.

"Well, send me a line from America or wherever you get to."

"Right," said Antony.

Old Gillingham returned to his paper. Antony was a younger son and, on the whole, not so interesting to his father as Champion Birket, for instance. But then Champion Birket was the best Hereford bull he had ever bred.

Antony, however, had no intention of going farther away than London. His idea of seeing the world was to see not countries but people; and to see them from as many angles as possible. There are all sorts in London if you know how to look at them. So Antony looked at them—from various strange corners; from the view-point of the valet, the newspaper reporter, the waiter, the shop assistant. With the independence of four hundred pounds a year behind him, he enjoyed it immensely. He never stayed long in one job and generally closed his connection with it by telling his employer, contrary to all etiquette as understood between master and servant, exactly what he thought of him. He had no difficulty in finding a new profession. Instead of experience and testimonials he offered his personality and a sporting bet. He would take no wages the first month and, if he satisfied his employer, double wages the second. He always got his double wages.

He was now thirty. He had come to Woodham for a holiday, because he liked the look of the station. His ticket entitled him to travel farther, but he had always intended to please himself in the matter. Woodham attracted him, he had a suitcase in the carriage with him and money in his pocket. Why not get out?

The landlady of the George was only too glad to put him up and promised that her husband would drive over that afternoon for his luggage.

"And you would like some lunch, I expect, sir."

"Yes, but don't give yourself any trouble about it. Cold, anything you've got."

"What about beef, sir?" she asked, as if she had a hundred varieties of meat to select from and was offering him her best.

"That will do splendidly. And a pint of beer."

While he was finishing his lunch the landlord came in to ask about the luggage. Antony ordered another pint and soon had him talking.

"It must be rather fun to keep a country inn," he said, thinking that it was about time he started another profession.

"I don't know about fun, sir. It gives us a living and a bit over."

"You ought to take a holiday," said Antony, looking at him thoughtfully.

"Funny thing your saying that," said the landlord with a smile. "Another gentleman, over from The Red House, was saying that only yesterday. Offered to take my place and all." He laughed rumblingly.

"The Red House? Not The Red House, Stanton?"

"That's right, sir. Stanton's the next station to Woodham. The Red House is about a mile from here—Mr. Ablett's."

Antony took a letter from his pocket. It was addressed from "The Red House, Stanton," and signed "Bill."

"Good old Bill," he murmured to himself. "He's getting on."

Antony had met Bill Beverley two years before in a tobacconist's shop. Gillingham was on one side of the counter and Mr. Beverley on the other. Something about Bill, his youth and freshness, perhaps, attracted Antony; and when cigarettes had been ordered and an address given to which they were to be sent, he remembered that he had come across an aunt of Beverley's once at a country house. Beverley and he met again a little later at a restaurant. Both of them were in evening dress, but they did different things with their napkins, and Antony was the more polite of the two. However, he still liked Bill. So on one of his holidays, when he was unemployed, he arranged an introduction through a mutual friend. Beverley was a little inclined to be shocked when he was reminded of their previous meetings,

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but his uncomfortable feeling soon wore off, and he and Antony quickly became intimate.

Antony decided to stroll over to The Red House after lunch and call upon his friend. Having inspected his bedroom, which was not quite the lavender-smelling country-inn bedroom of fiction, but sufficiently clean and comfortable, he set out over the fields.

As he came down the drive and approached the old red-brick front of the house, there was a lazy murmur of bees in the flower-borders, a gentle cooing of pigeons in the tops of the elms, and from distant lawns the whirr of a mowing-machine, that most restful of all country sounds.

And in the hall a man was banging at a locked door, and shouting, "Open the *door*, I say; open the *door!*"

"Hallo!" said Antony in amazement.

CAYLEY looked round suddenly at the voice.

"Can I help?" said Antony politely.

"Something's happened," said Cayley. He was breathing quickly. "I heard a shot—it sounded like a shot—I was in the library. A loud bang—I didn't know what it was. And the door's locked." He rattled the handle again and shook it. "Open the door!" he cried. "I say, Mark, what is it? Open the door!"

"But he must have locked the door on purpose," said Antony. "So why should he open it just because you ask him to?"

Cayley looked at him in a bewildered way. Then he turned to the door again. "We must break it in," he said, putting his shoulder to it. "Help me."

"Isn't there a window?"

Cayley turned to him stupidly.

"Window? Window?"

"So much easier to break in a window," said Antony with a smile. He looked very cool and collected, as he stood just inside the hall, leaning on his stick, and thinking, no doubt, that a great deal of fuss was being made about nothing. But then he had not heard the shot.

"Window—of course! What an idiot I am."

He pushed past Antony, and began running out into the drive. Antony followed him. They ran along the front of the house, down a path to the left, and then to the left again over the grass, Cayley in front, the other close behind him. Suddenly Cayley looked over his shoulder and pulled up short.

"Here," he said.

They had come to the windows of the locked room, French windows which opened on to the lawns at the back of the house. But now they were closed. Antony couldn't help feeling a thrill of excitement as he followed Cayley's example, and put his face close up to the glass. For the first time he wondered if there really had been a revolver-shot in this mysterious room. It had all seemed so absurd and melodramatic from the other side of the door. But if there had been one shot, why should there not be two more?—at the careless fools who were pressing their noses against the panes and asking for it.

"My God, can you see it?" said Cayley in a shaking voice. "Down there. Look?"

The next moment Antony saw it. A man was lying on the floor at the far end of the room, his back toward them. A man? Or the body of a man?

"Who is it?" said Antony.

"I don't know," the other whispered.

"Well, we'd better go and see." He considered the windows for a moment. "I should think if you put your weight into it, just where they join, they'll give all right. Otherwise, we can kick the glass in."

Without saying anything, Cayley put his weight into it. The window gave, and they went into the room. Cayley walked quickly to the body, and dropped on his knees by it. For the moment he seemed to hesitate; then with an effort he put a hand on to its shoulder and pulled it over.

"Thank God!" he murmured, and let the body go again.

"Who is it?" said Antony.

"Robert Ablett."

"Oh!" said Antony. "I thought his name was Mark," he added, more to himself than to the other.

"Yes, Mark Ablett lives here. Robert is his brother." He shuddered, and said, "I was afraid it was Mark."

"Was Mark in the room, too?"

"Yes," said Cayley absently. Then, as if resenting suddenly these questions from a stranger, "Who are you?"

But Antony had gone to the locked door and was turning the handle. "I suppose he put the key in his pocket," he said, as he came back to the body again.

"Who?"

Antony shrugged his shoulders.

"Whoever did this," he said, pointing to the man on the floor. "Is he dead?"

"Help me," said Cayley simply.

They turned the body on to its back, nerving themselves to look at it. Robert Ablett had been shot between the eyes. It was not a pleasant sight, and with his horror Antony felt a sudden pity for the man beside him, and a sudden remorse for the careless, easy way in which he had treated the affair. But then one always went about imagining that these things didn't happen—except to other people. It was difficult to believe in them just at first, when they happened to yourself.

"Did you know him well?" said Antony quickly. "Were you fond of him?"

"Hardly at all. Mark is *my* cousin. I mean, Mark is the brother I know best."

"Your cousin?"

"Yes." He hesitated, and then said, "Is he dead? I suppose he is. Will you—do you know anything about—about that sort of thing? Perhaps I'd better get some water."

There was another door opposite to the locked one, which led, as Antony was to discover for himself directly, into a passage from which opened two more rooms. Cayley stepped into the passage and opened the door on the right. The door from the office through which he had gone remained opened. The door at the end of the short passage was shut. Antony, kneeling by the body, followed Cayley with his eyes, and, after he had disappeared, kept his eyes on the blank wall of the passage, but he was not conscious of that at which he was looking, for his mind was with the other man, sympathizing with him.

"Not that water is any use to a dead body," he said to himself, "but the feeling that you're doing something, when there's obviously nothing to be done, is a great comfort."

CAYLEY came into the room again. He had a sponge in one hand, a handkerchief in the other. He looked at Antony. Antony nodded. Cayley murmured something, and knelt down to bathe the dead man's face. Then he placed the handkerchief over it. A little sigh escaped Antony, a sigh of relief.

They stood up and looked at each other.

"If I can be of any help to you," said Antony, "please let me."

"That's very kind of you. There will be things to do. Police, doctors—I don't know. But you mustn't let me trespass on your kindness. Indeed, I should apologize for having trespassed so much already."

"I came to see Beverley. He is an old friend of mine."

"He's out playing golf. He will be back directly." Then, as if he had only just realized it, "They will all be back directly."

"I will stay if I can be of any help."

"Please do. You see, there are women. It will be rather painful If you would—" He hesitated, and gave Antony a timid little smile, pathetic in so big and self-reliant a man. "Just your moral support, you know. It would be something."

"Of course." Antony smiled back at him, and said cheerfully, "Well, then, I'll begin by suggesting that you should ring up the police."

"The police? Y-yes." He looked doubtfully at the other. "I suppose——"

Antony spoke frankly.

"Now, look here, Mr.—er——"

"Cayley. I'm Mark Ablett's cousin. I live with him."

"My name's Gillingham; I'm sorry, I ought to have told you before. Well, now, Mr. Cayley, we shan't do any good by pretending. Here's a man been shot—well, somebody shot him."

"He might have shot himself," mumbled Cayley.

"Yes, he might have, but he didn't. Or if he did, somebody was in the room at the time, and that somebody isn't here now. And that somebody took a revolver away with him. Well, the police will want to say a word about that, won't they?"

Cayley was silent, looking on the ground.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking, and believe me I do sympathize with you, but we can't be children about it. If your cousin, Mark Ablett, was in the room with this—" he indicated the body—"this man, then——"

"Who said he was?" said Cayley, jerking his head up suddenly at Antony.

"You did."

"I was in the library. Mark went in—he may have come out again. I know nothing. Somebody else may have gone in——"

"Yes, yes," said Antony patiently, as if to a little child. "You know your cousin; I don't. Let's agree that he had nothing to do with it. But somebody was in the room when this man was shot, and—well, the police will have to know. Don't you think—" He looked at the telephone. "Or would you rather I did it?"

Cayley shrugged his shoulders and went to the telephone.

"May I—er—look round a bit?" Antony nodded toward the open door.

"Oh, do. Yes." He sat down and drew the telephone toward him. "You must make allowances for me, Mr. Gillingham. You see, I've known Mark for a very long time. But, of course, you're quite right, and I'm merely being stupid." He took off the receiver.

LET us suppose that, for the purpose of making a first acquaintance with this "office," we are coming into it from the hall through the door which is now locked, but which, for our special convenience, has been magically unlocked for us. As we stand just inside the door, the length of the room runs right and left, or, more accurately, to the right only; for the left-hand wall is almost within our reach. Immediately opposite to us, across the breadth of the room (some fifteen feet) is that other door, by which Cayley went out and returned a few minutes ago.

In the right-hand wall, thirty feet away from us, are the French windows. Crossing the room and going out by the opposite door, we come into a passage, from which two rooms lead. The one on the right, into which Cayley went, is less than half the length of the office, a small square room, which has evidently been used some time or other as a bedroom. The bed is no longer there, but there is a basin, with hot and cold taps, in a corner, chairs, a cupboard or two and a chest of drawers. The window faces the same way as the French windows in the next room; but anybody looking out of the bedroom window has his view on the immediate right shut off by the outer wall of the office, which projects, by reason of its greater length, fifteen feet further into the lawn.

The room on the other side of the bedroom is a bathroom. The three rooms together, in fact, form a sort of private suite; used, perhaps, during the occupation of the previous owner, by some invalid, who could not manage the stairs, but allowed by Mark to fall into disuse, save for the living-room. At any rate, he never slept down-stairs.

Antony glanced at the bathroom, and then wandered into the bedroom, the room into which Cayley had been. The window was open, and he looked out at the well-kept grass beneath him, and the peaceful stretch of park beyond; and he felt very sorry for the owner of it all, who was now mixed up in so grim a business.

"Cayley thinks he did it," said Antony to himself. "That's obvious. It explains why he wasted so much time banging on the door. Why should he try to break a lock when it's so much easier to break a window? Of course he might just have lost his head; on the other hand, he might—well, he might have wanted to give his cousin a chance of getting away. The same about the police, and—oh, lots of things. Why, for instance, did he run all the way round the house in order to get to the windows? Surely there's a back way out through the hall. I must have a look later on."

Antony, it will be observed, had by no means lost *his* head.

There was a step in the passage outside, and he turned round, to see Cayley in the doorway. He remained looking at him for a moment, asking himself a question. It was rather a curious question. He was asking himself why the door was open.

Well, not exactly why the door was open; that could be explained easily enough. But why had he expected the door to be shut? He did not remember shutting it, but somehow he was surprised to see it open now, to see Cayley through the doorway, just coming into the room. Something working subconsciously in his brain had told him that it was surprising. Why?

He tucked the matter away in a corner of his mind for the moment; the answer would come to him later on. He had a wonderfully retentive mind. Everything which he saw or heard seemed to make its corresponding impression somewhere in his brain, often without his being conscious of it; and these photographic impressions were always there ready for him when he wished to develop them.

Cayley joined him at the window.

"I've telephoned," he said. "They're sending an inspector or some one from

Middleston, and the local police and doctor from Stanton." He shrugged his shoulders. "We're in for it now."

"How far away is Middleston?" It was the town for which Antony had taken a ticket that morning—only six hours ago. How absurd it seemed.

"About twenty miles. Those people will be coming back soon."

"Beverley, and the others?"

"Yes. I expect they'll want to go away at once."

"Much better that they should."

"Yes." Cayley was silent for a little. Then he said, "You're staying near here?"

"I'm at the George, at Woodham."

"If you're by yourself, I wish you'd put up here. You see," he went on awkwardly, "you'll have to be here—for the—the inquest and—and so on. If I may offer you my cousin's hospitality in his—I mean if he doesn't—if he really has——"

Antony broke in hastily with his thanks and acceptance.

"That's good. Perhaps Beverley will stay on, if he's a friend of yours. He's a good fellow."

Antony felt quite sure, from what Cayley had said and had hesitated to say, that Mark had been the last to see his brother alive. It didn't follow that Mark Ablett was a murderer. Revolvers go off accidentally; and when they have gone off, people lose their heads and run away, fearing that their story will not be believed. Nevertheless, when people run away, whether innocently or guiltily, one can't help wondering which way they went.

"I suppose this way," said Antony aloud, looking out of the window.

"Who?" said Cayley stubbornly.

"Well, whoever it was," said Antony, smiling to himself. "The murderer. Or, let us say, the man who locked the door after Robert Ablett was killed."

"I wonder."

"Well, how else could he have got away? He didn't go by the windows in the next room, because they were shut."

"Isn't that rather odd?"

"Well, I thought so at first, but—" He pointed to the wall jutting out on the right. "You see, you're protected from the rest of the house if you get out here, and you're quite close to the shrubbery. If you go out at the French windows, I imagine you're much more visible. All that part of the house—" he waved his right hand—"the west, well, northwest almost, where the kitchen parts are—you see, you're hidden from them here. Oh, yes, he knew the house, whoever it was, and he was quite right to come out of this window. He'd be into the shrubbery at once."

Cayley looked at him thoughtfully.

"It seems to me, Mr. Gillingham, that you know the house pretty well, considering that this is the first time you've been in it."

Antony laughed.

"Oh, well, I notice things, you know. I was born noticing. But I'm right, am I not, about why he went out this way?"

"Yes, I think you are." Cayley looked away—toward the shrubbery. "Do you want to look in there now?" He nodded at it.

"I think we might leave that to the police," said Antony gently. It's—well, there's no hurry."

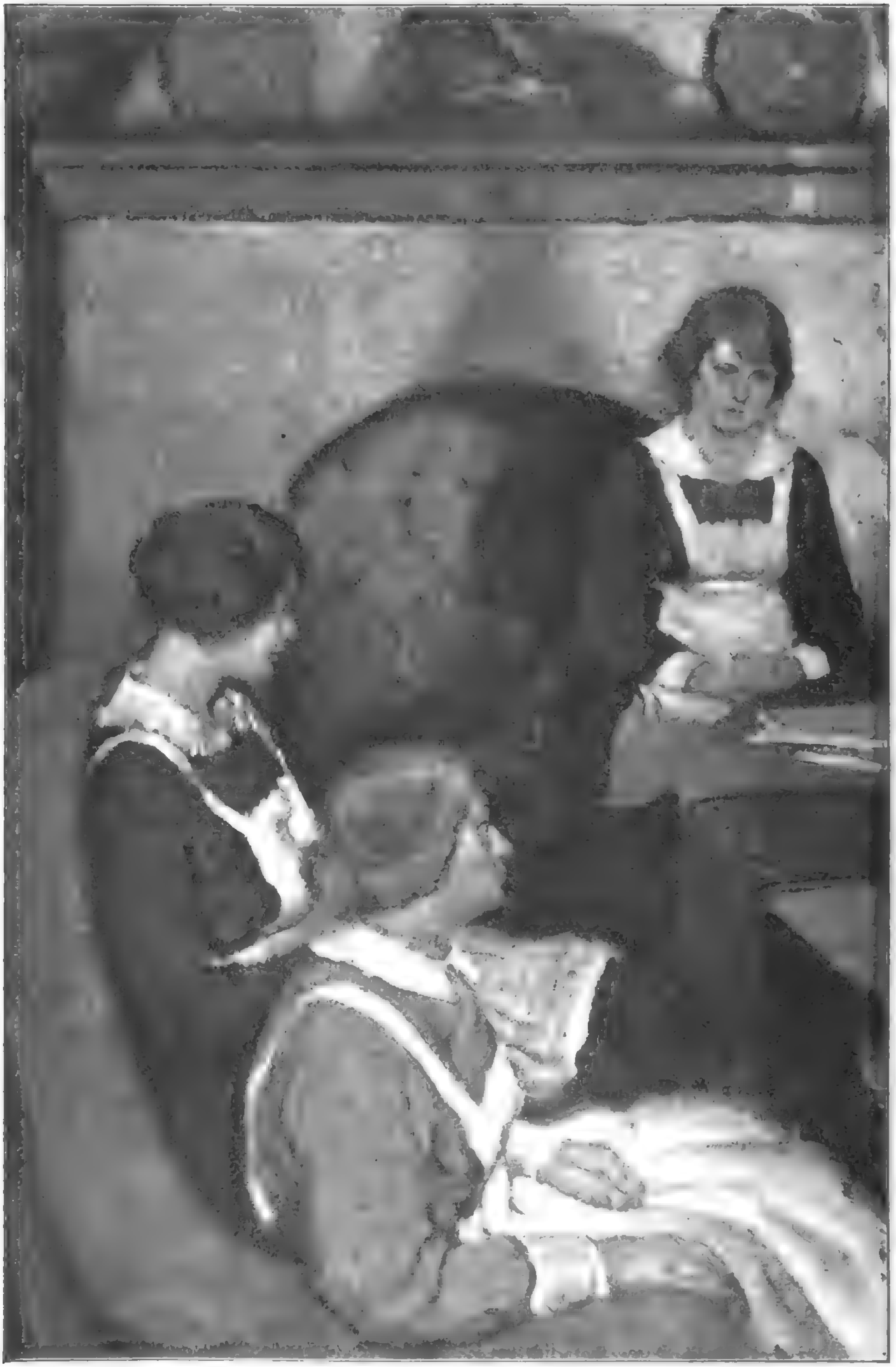
Cayley gave a little sigh; as if he had been holding his breath for the answer, and could now breathe again.

"Thank you, Mr. Gillingham," he said.

GUESTS at The Red House were allowed to do what they liked within reason—the reasonableness or otherwise of it being decided by Mark. But when once they (or Mark) had made up their minds as to what they wanted to do, the plan had to be kept. Mrs. Calladine, who knew this little weakness of their host's resisted, therefore, the suggestion of Bill that they should have a second round in the afternoon, and drive home comfortably after tea. The other golfers were willing enough, but Mrs. Calladine, without actually saying that Mr. Ablett wouldn't like it, was firm on the point that, having arranged to be back by four, they should be back by four.

"I really don't think Mark wants us, you know," said the major. Having played badly in the morning, he wanted to prove to himself in the afternoon that he was really better than that. "With this brother of his coming, he'll be only too glad to have us out of the way."

Mrs. Calladine fell. It was very pleasantly cool outside the golf-house, and of course Mark would be rather glad to have them out of the way. So she consented to



"That's right, sir," said Elsie eagerly. "And then Mr. Mark said

loudly—sort of triumphant-like—'It's my turn now. You wait!' "

nine holes; and the match having ended all square, and everybody having played much better than in the morning, they drove back to The Red House, very well pleased with themselves.

"Hallo!" said Bill to himself, as they approached the house, "isn't that old Tony?"

Antony was standing in front of the house waiting for them. Bill waved, and he waved back. Then as the car drew up, Bill, who was in front with the chauffeur, jumped down and greeted him eagerly.

"Hallo! you old rascal, have you come to stay, or what?" He had a sudden idea. "Don't say you're Mark Ablett's long-lost brother from Australia, though I could quite believe it of you." He laughed boyishly.

"Hallo, Bill!" said Antony quietly. "Will you introduce me? I'm afraid I've got some bad news."

Bill, rather sobered by this, introduced him. The major and Mrs. Calladine were on the near side of the car, and Antony spoke to them in a low voice.

"I'm afraid I'm going to give you a shock," he said. "Robert Ablett, Mr. Mark Albett's brother, has been killed." He jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "In the house."

"Good God!" said the major.

"Do you mean that he has killed himself?" asked Mrs. Calladine. "Just now?"

"It was about two hours ago. I happened to come here"—he half-turned to Beverley and explained—"I was coming to see you, Bill—and I arrived just after the—the death. Mr. Cayley and I found the body. Mr. Cayley being busy just now—there are police and doctors and so on in the house—he asked me to tell you. He says that no doubt you would prefer, the house-party having been broken up in this tragic way, to leave as soon as possible." He gave a pleasant apologetic little smile and went on, "I am putting it badly, but what he means, of course, is that you must consult your own feelings in the matter entirely, and please make your own arrangements about ordering the car for whatever train you wish to catch. There is one this evening, I understand, which you could go by if you wished it."

Bill gazed with open mouth at Antony. He had no words in his vocabulary to express what he wanted to say, other than those the major had already used. Betty was leaning across to Miss Norris and saying "Who's killed?" in an awestruck voice, and Miss Norris, who was instinctively looking as tragic as she looked on the stage when a messenger announced the death of one of the characters, stopped for a moment in order to explain. Mrs. Calladine was quietly mistress of herself.

"We shall be in the way, yes, I quite understand," she said; "but we can't just shake the dust of the place off our shoes because something terrible has happened there. I must see Mark, and we can arrange later what to do. He must know how very deeply we feel for him. Perhaps we—" she hesitated.

"The major and I might be useful anyway," said Bill. "Isn't that what you mean, Mrs. Calladine?"

"Cayley wants you to stay, Bill. You have to go anyhow, to-morrow, Major Rumbold?" He smiled and added, "Please forgive me if I seem to have taken a good deal upon myself, but I just happened to be handy as a mouthpiece for Cayley." He bowed to them and went into the house.

"Well!" said Miss Norris dramatically.

AS ANTHONY reentered the hall, the inspector from Middleston was crossing into the library with Cayley. The latter stopped and nodded to Antony.

"Wait a moment, inspector. Here's Mr. Gillingham. He'd better come with us." And then to Antony, "This is Inspector Birch."

Birch looked inquiringly from one to the other.

"Mr. Gillingham and I found the body together," explained Cayley.

"Oh! Well, come along, and let's get the facts sorted out a bit. I like to know where I am, Mr. Gillingham."

"We all do."

"Oh!" He looked at Antony with interest. "D'you know where you are in this case?"

"I know where I'm going to be."

"Where's that?"

"Put through it by Inspector Birch," said Antony with a smile.

The inspector laughed genially.

"Well, I'll spare you as much as I can. Come along."

They went into the library. The inspector seated himself at a writing-table, and Cayley sat in a chair by the side of it. Antony made himself comfortable in an armchair and prepared to be interested.

"We'll start with the dead man," said the inspector. "Robert Ablett, didn't you say?" He took out his note-book.

"Yes. Brother of Mark Ablett, who lives here."

"Ah!" He began to sharpen a pencil. "Staying in the house?"

"Oh, no."

Antony listened attentively while Cayley explained all that he knew about Robert. This was news to him.

"I see. Sent out of the country in disgrace. What had he done?"

"I hardly know. I was only about twelve at the time. The sort of age when you're told not to ask questions."

"Inconvenient questions?"

"Exactly."

"So you don't really know whether he had been merely wild or—or wicked?"

"No. Old Mr. Ablett was a clergyman," added Cayley. "Perhaps what might seem wicked to a clergyman might seem only wild to a man of the world."

"I dare say, Mr. Cayley," smiled the inspector. "Anyhow, it was more convenient to have him in Australia?"

"Yes."

"Mark Ablett never talked about him?"

"Hardly ever. He was very much ashamed of him, and—well, very glad he was in Australia."

"Did he write Mark sometimes?"

"Occasionally. Perhaps three or four times in the last five years."

"Asking for money?"

"Something of the sort. I don't think Mark always answered them. As far as I know, he never sent any money."

"Now, your own private opinion, Mr. Cayley. Do you think that Mark was unfair to his brother? Unduly hard on him?"

"They'd never liked each other as boys. There was never any affection between them. I don't know whose fault it was in the first place—if anybody's."

"Still, Mark might have given him a hand?"

"I understand," said Cayley, "that Robert spent his whole life asking for hands."

The inspector nodded.

"I know that sort. Well, now, we'll get on to this morning. This letter that Mark got—did you see it?"

"Not at the time. He showed it to me afterwards."

"Any address?"

"No. A half-sheet of rather dirty paper."

"Where is it now?"

"I don't know. In Mark's pocket, I expect."

"Ah!" He rubbed his chin. "Well, we'll come to that. Can you remember what it said?"

"As far as I remember, something like this. "Mark, your loving brother is coming to see you to-morrow, all the way from Australia. I give you warning so that you will be able to conceal your surprise, but not I hope your pleasure. Expect him at three, or thereabouts!"

"Ah!" The inspector copied it down carefully. "Did you notice the postmark?"

"London."

"And what was Mark's attitude?"

"Annoyance, disgust—" Cayley hesitated.

"Apprehension?"

"N-no, not exactly. Or, rather, apprehension of an unpleasant interview, not of any unpleasant outcome for himself."

"You mean that he wasn't afraid of violence, or blackmail, or anything of that sort?"

"He didn't appear to be."

"Right. Now, then, he arrived, you say, about three o'clock?"

"Yes, about that."

"Who was in the house then?"

"Mark and myself, and some of the servants. I don't know which. Of course, you will ask them directly, no doubt."

"With your permission. No guests?"

"They were out all day playing golf," explained Cayley. "Oh, by the way, inspector," he put in, "if I may interrupt a moment, will you want to see them at all? It isn't very pleasant for them now, naturally, and I suggested—" he turned to Antony, who nodded back to him—"I understand that they want to go back to London this evening. There's no objection to that, I suppose?"

"You will let me have their names and addresses in case I want to communicate with them?"

"Of course. One of them is staying on, if you would like to see him later, but they only came back from their golf as we crossed the hall."

"That's all right, Mr. Cayley. Well, now then, let's go back to three o'clock. Where were you when Robert arrived?"

CAYLEY explained how he had been sitting in the hall, how Audrey had asked him where the master was, and how he had said that he had last seen him going up to the Temple.

"She went away, and I went on with my book. There was a step on the stairs, and I looked up to see Mark coming down. He went into the office, and I went on with my book again. I went into the library for a moment, to refer to another book, and when I was in there I heard a shot. At least it was a loud bang, I wasn't sure if it was a shot. I stood and listened. Then I came slowly to the door and looked out. Then I went back again, hesitated a bit, you know, and finally decided to go across to the office, and make sure that it was all right. I turned the handle of the door and found it was locked. Then I got frightened, and I banged at the door, and shouted, and —well, that was when Mr. Gillingham arrived." He went on to explain how they had found the body.

The inspector looked at him with a smile. "Yes, well, we shall have to go over some of that again, Mr. Cayley. Mr. Mark, now. You thought he was in the Temple. Could he have come in, and gone up to his room, without your seeing him?"

"There are back stairs. He wouldn't have used them in the ordinary way, of course. But I wasn't in the hall all the afternoon. He might easily have gone up-stairs without my knowing anything about it."

"So that you weren't surprised when you saw him coming down?"

"Oh, not a bit."

"Well, did he say anything?"

"He said, 'Robert's here?' or something of the sort. I suppose he'd heard the bell, or the voices in the hall."

"Which way does his bedroom face? Could he have seen him coming down the drive?"

"He might have, yes."

"Well?"

"Well, then, I said 'Yes,' and he gave a sort of shrug, and said, 'Don't go too far away; I might want you'; and then went in."

"What did you think he meant by that?"

"Well, he consults me a good deal, you know. I'm his sort of unofficial solicitor."

"This was a business meeting rather than a brotherly one?"

"Oh, yes. That's how he regarded it, I'm sure."

"Yes. How long was it before you heard the shot?"

"Very soon. Two minutes, perhaps."

The inspector finished his writing, and then regarded Cayley thoughtfully. Suddenly he said:

"What is your theory of Robert's death?"

Cayley shrugged his shoulders.

"You've probably seen more than I've seen," he answered. "It's your job. I can only speak as a layman—and Mark's friend."

"Well?"

"Then I should say that Robert came here meaning trouble, and bringing a revolver with him. He produced it almost at once, Mark tried to get it from him, there was a little struggle perhaps, and it went off. Mark lost his head, finding himself there with a revolver in his hand and a dead man at his feet. His one idea was to escape. He locked the door almost instinctively, and then, when he heard me hammering at it, went out of the window."

"Y-yes. Well, that sounds reasonable enough. What do you say, Mr. Gillingham?"

"I should hardly call it 'reasonable' to lose your head," said Antony, getting up from his chair and coming toward them.

"Well, you know what I mean. It explains things."

"Oh, yes. Any other explanation would make them much more complicated."

"Have you any other explanation?"

"Not I."

"Are there any points on which you would like to correct Mr. Cayley? Anything that he left out after you arrived here?"

"No, thanks. He described it all very accurately."

"Ah! Well, now, about yourself. You're not staying in the house, I gather?"

Antony explained his previous movements.

"Yes. Did you hear the shot?"

Antony put his head on one side, as if listening.

"Yes. Just as I came in sight of the house. It didn't make any impression at the time, but I remember it now."

"Where were you then?"

"Coming up the drive. I was just in sight of the house."

"Nobody left the house by the front door after the shot?"

Antony closed his eyes and considered.

"Nobody," he said. "No."

"You're certain of that?"

"Absolutely," said Antony, as though rather surprised that he could be suspected of a mistake.

"Thank you. You're at the George, if I want you?"

"Mr. Gillingham is staying here until after the inquest," explained Cayley.

"Good. Well, now, about these servants."

THE inspector hesitated.

"I think, Mr. Cayley, it would be better if I saw the servants alone. You know what they are; the more people about, the more they get alarmed. I expect I can get at the truth better by myself."

"Oh, quite so. In fact, I was going to ask you to excuse me. I feel rather responsible toward these guests of ours. Although Mr. Gillingham very kindly—" He smiled at Antony, who was waiting at the door, and left his sentence unfinished.

"Ah, that reminds me," said the inspector. "Didn't you say that one of your guests—Mr. Beverley, was it?—a friend of Mr. Gillingham's, was staying on?"

"Yes. Would you like to see him?"

"Afterward, if I may."

"I'll warn him. I shall be up in my room, if you want me. I have a room upstairs where I work—any of the servants will show you. Ah, Stevens. Inspector Birch would like to ask you a few questions."

"Yes, sir," said Audrey primly, but inwardly fluttering.

The housekeeper's room had heard something of the news by this time, and Audrey had had a busy time explaining to the other members of the staff exactly what *he* had said, and what *she* had said. Elsie, too, had a contribution to make; she had not been left out of it. She had actually heard Mr. Mark in the office, threatening his brother.

"He said, I heard him say it with my own ears, 'It's my turn now,' he said. Triumphant-like."

But Audrey remembered Elsie's words when she was in front of Inspector Birch. She gave her own evidence with the readiness of one who had already repeated it several times, and was examined and cross-examined by the inspector with considerable skill.

"Then you didn't see Mr. Mark at all?

"No, sir; he must have come in before and gone up to his room. Or come in by the front door, likely enough, while I was going out by the back."

"Now what about the other servants?"

"Elsie heard the master and Mr. Robert talking together," said Audrey eagerly. "He was saying—Mr. Mark I mean——"

"Ah! Well, I think Elsie had better tell me that herself."

Elsie was not sorry to get the summons. All that interested the inspector was that she was passing through the hall and heard voices in the office.

"And stopped to listen?"

"Certainly not," said Elsie with dignity, feeling that nobody really understood her.

"Try to remember the exact words."

Something about working in a passage, thought Elsie.

"Yes, but who said it?"

"Mr. Robert."

"How do you know it was Mr. Robert? Had you heard his voice before?"

"I don't take it upon myself to say that I had had any acquaintance with Mr. Robert, but seeing that it wasn't Mr. Mark, nor yet Mr. Cayley, nor any other of the gentlemen, and Miss Stevens had shown Mr. Robert into the office not five minutes before——"

"Quite so," said the inspector hurriedly. "Mr. Robert undoubtedly. Working in a passage?"

"That was what it sounded like, sir."

"H'm. Working a passage over—could that have been it?"

"That's right, sir," said Elsie eagerly. "He'd worked his passage over."

"Well?"

"And then Mr. Mark said loudly—sort of triumphant-like—'It's *my* turn now. You wait.' "

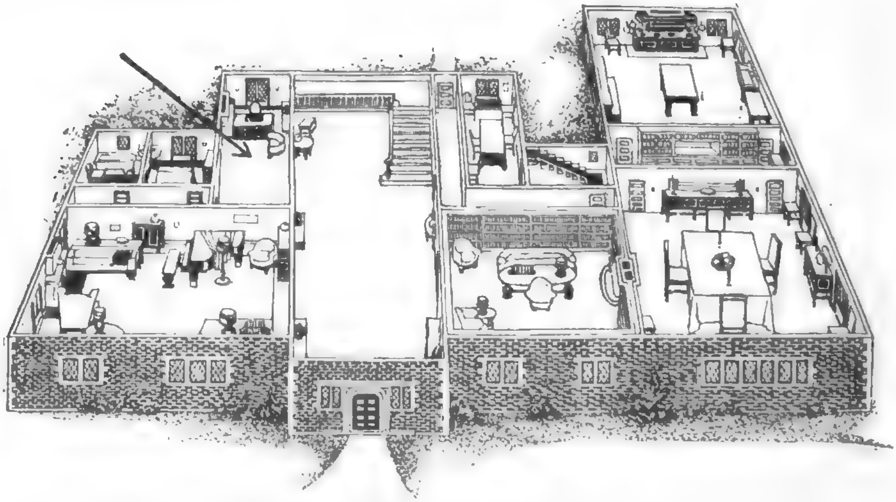
"Triumphantly?"

"As much as to say his chance had come."

MEANWHILE Antony had been exploring a little on his own. There was a point which was puzzling him. He went through the hall to the front of the house and stood at the open door, looking out on to the drive. He and Cayley had run round the house to the left. Surely it would have been quicker to have run round to the right? The front door was not in the middle of the house, it was toward the end. Undoubtedly they went the longest way round. But perhaps there was something in the way, if one went to the right—a wall, say. He strolled off in that direction, followed a path round the house and came in sight of the office windows. Quite simple, and about half the distance of the other way. He went on a little farther, and came to a door, just beyond the broken-in windows. It opened easily, and he found himself in a passage. At the end of the passage was another door. He opened it and found himself in the hall again.

"And, of course, that's the quickest way of the three," he said to himself. "Through the hall, and out at the back; turn to the left and there you are. Instead of which, we ran the longest way round the house. Why? Was it to give Mark more time in which to escape? Only, in that case—why *run?* Also, how did Cayley know then that it was Mark who was trying to escape? If he had guessed—well, not guessed, but been afraid—that one had shot the other, it was much more likely that Robert had shot Mark. Indeed, he had admitted that this was what he thought. The first thing he had said when he turned the body over was: 'Thank God! I was afraid it was Mark.' But why should he want to give *Robert* time in which to get away? And again—why *run,* if he did want to give him time?"

Was the murder an accident and did Mark lose his head and run away? "The Red House Murder" will be continued in the September Number, out August 15.



On the right of the hall of the Red House the doors lead into the library, dining-room and kitchen. The second door on the left leads into a three-room suite the largest room of which is called the office. Here Antony found Cayley pounding on the locked door. Cayley led him out the front door, turned to his left around to the rear of the house. Breaking in the window, they found the body at the spot marked by the arrow. Had he turned to his right the distance would have been half as great, while the shortest way of all was through the back door at the rear of the hall. Why did Cayley choose the longest way round?

The Sunny Side of Nineteen

When the Girl Who Never Says Die Meets the Strong, Silent Man Something Worth While Always Happens

By Leonard Hatch

Illustrations by Will Foster

My Room, Half-past midnight.
DEAR FLOPS:

Just look at what time it is! If your Aunt Jessie could see me starting in to write a letter at this hour, she'd pucker up her lips that funny way she does, and say, "When I was your age young girls weren't *allowed* to keep such hours!"

And if daddy takes it into his head to go prowling about in the night, as he often does, and sees the light under my door, maybe I won't just catch it!

But, Flops dear, it's been such a *wonderful* evening. And I'm so desperately wide awake and so all stirred up, that I've just *got* to tell somebody all about it.

AT THIS point in her letter Cristina Dinant paused and stared with a sort of melancholy rapture at the little rose-shaded reading-lamp on her desk. Not that she saw or was conscious of that rose-colored shade, any more than she saw the rose-garlanded wall-paper or the rose-patterned draperies of her room. She was looking through and beyond all these, at some rose-hued vista of her thoughts.

If you could have looked into that room—even lacking its occupant—you would have said instantly that it belonged to some one on the sunny side of nineteen. And in that case you would have been quite correct; for Cristina Dinant was just over eighteen. That is the age when Cristinas, like Daphnes and Delias, think nothing of scribbling long letters to their bosom friends at any hour of day or night. That is also the age when it is obviously natural to address a bosom friend like Florence Newhall as Flops, or Flopserino for short.

Cristina yanked herself out of her revery and, dipping her pen, again took up the thread of her letter:

Why did you ever choose this particular time to visit that old Philadelphia, and miss just the *duckiest* theatre party there's been this winter? Caroline Cargyle gave it for a cousin of hers who's visiting her from Rochester or Syracuse or some other one of those Western cities. She's nice enough, but her nose is always shiny, and she doesn't make much of a hit with the men. But I suppose it takes all kinds to make up a world, as Miss Barry used to tell us in those heart-to-heart talks after English Comp.

Of course Jimmie Cargyle was at the party, and after the first act he and I had a long talk, mostly about ourselves. And he got quite—well, quite ardent, and said he liked me *because I had a soul as well as a body*. He did, on my sacred honor, those were his very words. And I didn't know whether to giggle or blush, so I did both. And Caroline heard him and sort of scowled at us. I think she only heard the last part of it anyhow.

And Jimmie talked about you too. He said your eyes always made him feel—well, it was highly complimentary, Flopserino, and I'm going to keep it as a trade last for you. But bring me a good one.

And Buddy Duncan was there too. And he told me he thought this talk about love at first sight was all bunk. It made me just furious. I was so mad I could have killed him. But I said: "Oh, is that so? Well, you ought to know, Goldfish—you've been round the globe." And then everybody gave him the laugh, for you must admit he looks something like a fish himself.

And Dick Pendleton was there too, with that rose-leaf skin of his and that sleepy drawl. But of course he wasn't thinking of anything but Betsey Lingard—just hung on every word she uttered.

But the play! the play!—Oh, Flops, I shan't forget it if I live to be a thousand. It was too beautiful for words. And sad!— My dear, I wept buckets.

It's a new play called "His Great Moment." And Julian Wrentham was in it. And he was never quite so *wonderful* before. Nothing in the world can make me believe he hasn't got a secret sorrow in his own life—sometime years ago. His eyes are so melancholy that even when he smiles you can just imagine his heart is breaking all the time.

He just fitted this play too. It's all about his being in love with a Princess who has to marry another man to keep the kingdom going, or something. And she never even guesses his love till near the end. In the last act he fights a duel with a man who said something disrespectful of the Princess. And he wounds Julian fatally. And just as he's dying, the Princess comes. And she finally understands. And he asks her for just one kiss. And she does. That's His Great Moment. And he says, in a faint faraway whisper—"O Death, where is thy Sting?"—And then he dies, right there in her arms.

Do you wonder I cried? It's all I can do not to begin blubbering again this minute, just thinking of it. It was just *too beautiful* for words.

Holy crocodile!—as daddy says—it's half-past one this minute. Me for the downy trundle-bed as Dick says.

Come back soon, Flops. And don't forget your half of the trade last. There used to be some well-wishers of mine (as Uncle Henry says) in Phila.

But oh! you should have seen that heavenly light in his eyes when she kissed him as he was dying!

Nightie-night!
CRIS.

"FORTY thirty."

One more point would give Cristina the match in the finals which she was playing with her special rival, Doris Pemberton, on the courts of the Beachhampton Club.

Cristina steadied herself for her serve. Then a tanned brown arm swung at full reach through the air and shot a wickedly twisting service across the net. When her antagonist's return wabbled weakly back, Cristina came sprinting to the net and volleyed the ball unerringly to the deep backhand corner for game, set, match.

As the two girls shook hands across the net, the galley broke into sincere applause at the outcome of the match. The most casual outsider could have realized that there was no perfunctory undertone to that applause, nothing perfunctory about the way Cristina was engulfed by her friends. And when Cristina was surrounded by her friends it meant being surrounded by practically the entire summer colony at Beachhampton.

At eighteen and a half she was young for her age. More than that, she was the sort that will always remain young for her age, whatever that age may be.

In appearance she was a composite of the prettiest magazine-cover girl you ever saw, and the second prettiest. Or, if you don't fancy magazine-cover girls, she was like Peter Pan plus a strong infusion of romantic girlhood. She said she liked sunshine better than moonlight, but in the next breath she declared she loved moonlight because it always made her want to cry. Sparks of happiness sprang from her like the sparks which leap from the whirling emery wheel when metal touches it.

If you fancy—just because you have happened to look over her shoulder when she was scribbling a letter to Florence Newhall—that you know all about Cristina, consider the multiplex facets of her character as indicated by what various persons at Beachhampton said of her.

Captain Billings, the life-saver at the beach, said that she could take the day-after-a-storm rollers better than any man.

"Rube" Prentice, he of the racing car, seeing her take those rollers, declared he didn't wonder that all the mermen off the Long Island coast left the other resorts flat and booked reserved seats just outside the life-line to watch her.

Paul Braithwaite, the mountain climber, watching her in the surf one day, said she was the only person he'd ever seen who justified the sea.

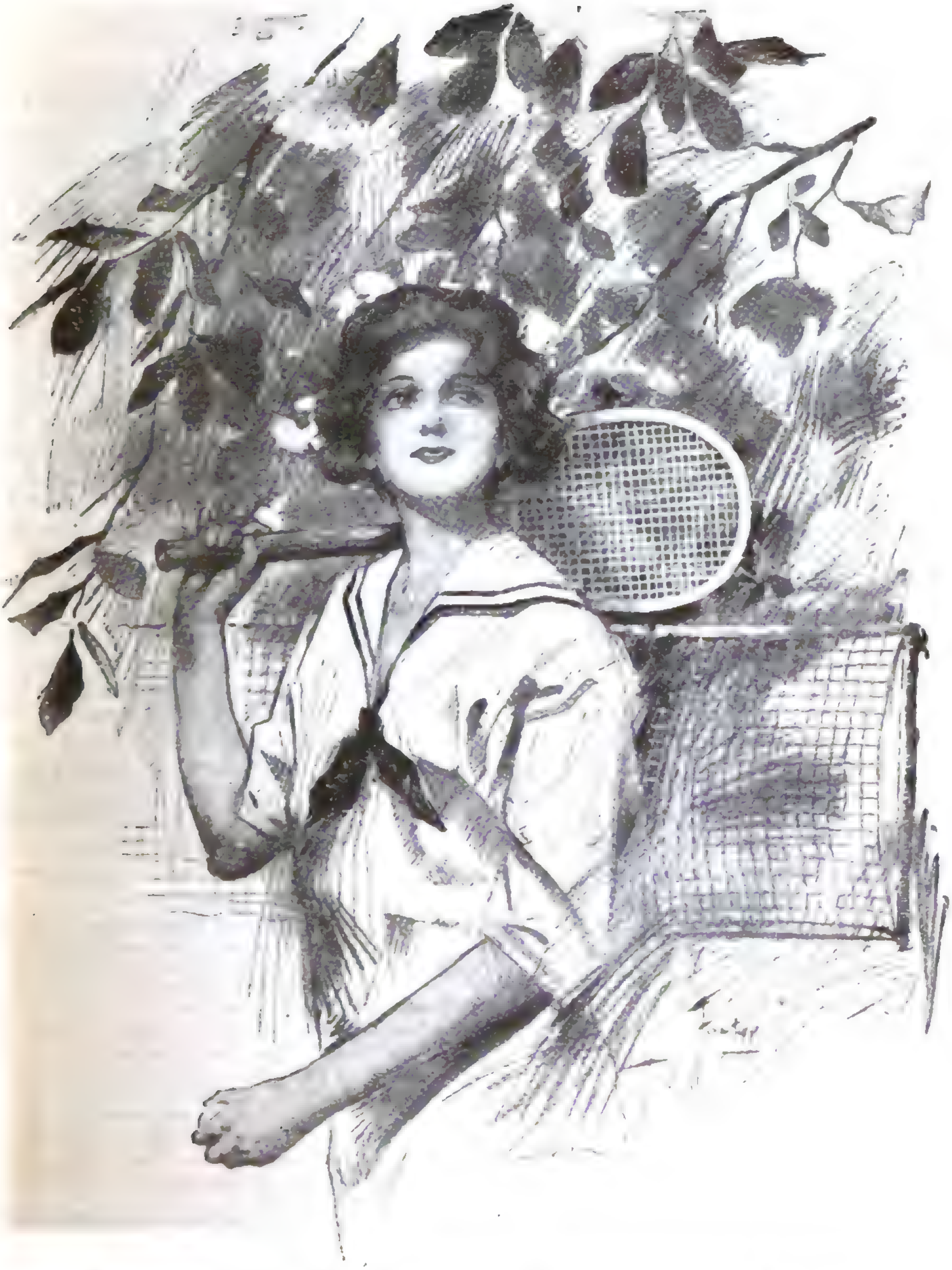
Old Mrs. Penny, usually as crusty as a French roll, said she liked to drop her ball of wool so that Cristina would pick it up with a smile.

Old Mr. James, the portrait painter, said that Cristina ought to be placed on the pedestal at present occupied by the statue of Liberty, so that incoming foreigners might see what kind of girls this country produced.

Vincent Waverley, the cynic and wit, said that if all other women were represented by one single grain of sand, she was Sahara.

Doris Pemberton, the next best bet in the summer colony, said that she liked Cristina. Said it with entire truth, which was probably the highest compliment Cristina received.

Her father said nothing at all, because he



She said she liked sunshine better than moonlight, but in the next breath she declared she loved the moonlight because it always made her want to cry.

was too busy loving her. And, among all her activities, which were manifold, her chief one was loving him back. A happy fact, too; for her mother was dead.

From all of which assortment of verdicts from young and old, man *and* woman, it may perhaps be inferred that Cristina Dinant was not exactly unpopular at Beachhampton.

To see her with the crowd swarming round her after merely winning the July Ladies' Singles—which every one knew she would win—and congratulating her, you would have said that she had accomplished some mighty international feat of sportsmanship at least. And her own frank and honest pleasure in her victory and in all the to-do about it, was by no means the least charming part of the picture.

Up in the forefront of the press were her three chief adorers, her inseparable bodyguard, each of whom was eternally plotting and striving, from the moment he chose his matin cravat till the beach fires flickered into embers, how to win her for a few minutes to himself.

This trio was made up of Jimmie Cargyle, who had just crowned his Junior year at Yale by his election to the football captaincy; Blair MacFadyean, commonly known as Tubby MacFadyean because of his persistent rotundity; and Harry Varnum, who, although he had only just begun to shave, was suffering from an aggravated case of the desire of the moth for the star.

Professional-wit Waverly had hit the trio off not so undeftly. Cargyle he had called "Hercules as the human doormat." Tubby MacFadyean he had characterized as "a butterball in the throes of the grand passion." And one day when Cristina strolled up the beach with little Harry, Waverley had remarked: "Look! There goes the girl who can't grow up, with the boy who can't grow down."

You can well believe that Cargyle, Tubby MacFadyean and the dog-like Harry were using the tennis match as a pretext to get close to Cris.

"It was wonderful, Cris," said Cargyle.

"You never played a better game in your life, Cris," said Tubby.

"You were simply—" began Harry, stopping because he was rewarded with such a dimpling sunburst of a smile that made it quite unnecessary for him to say more.

Yet the smile was for the trio as a whole. They were dear boys, all three of them. She liked to hear their words of praise, she loved to have them round, together or singly. In fact, from their angle, that was the worst of it: it didn't seem to make an ice-cream cone's worth of difference to her whether she talked to them together or to any one of them alone. It was maddening, that's what it was—maddening. Yet somehow it seemed to whet rather than quench their devotion.

As a matter of fact, she wasn't paying much attention to them that instant, in spite of the warm smile which included all three of them within its impartial caress. Strictly speaking, she wasn't looking at them at all, but beyond them at a young man who was at that moment engaged in doing nothing except to be as completely indifferent to his surroundings as he usually was. He was a young man in the sense of being only about twenty-six; but to Cristina's eight years less, that seemed like ultimate maturity. Contrasted with the unlicked cubs who were gamboling about her, begging for crumbs of attention, this young man—serenely unconscious of her victory and herself—appeared as if poised upon some private Mount Olympus of his own where he had nothing to do but look blond, beautiful, and bored.

According to every rule of cloister-logic, Cristina should have gazed upon this indifferent young man with less interest than she had for the eager and ardent striplings about her. But as a matter of plain fact Cristina's eyes contained a trace of that rapt expression with which, months ago, she had regarded her lamp-shade while writing about Julian Wrentham, her stage hero, to her beloved pal, Flops Newhall.

A week ago, Cristina had written, in her weekly news-scrawl to Flops, as follows:

> . . . There's a new man here this summer—a regular mystery named Peter Benton. Not one of the girls here can make him out—whether he's just the shyest man in the world or whether he's as stuck on himself as a piece of gum. He's the type of person I used to think a Prince looked like when I was young. As a matter of fact, his father is a big man in the dye business.
>
> He doesn't go to the net much when he plays tennis. But then, he doesn't have to, to win. And swim! My dear, he can swim like a bolt from the blue, and the first day he went in, the life-saver watched him for two whole minutes without letting his pipe go out. And he has perfectly good eyes.
>
> Of course I was properly hospitable to him when we met for the first time. Being a new man he's at least entitled to consideration. And what *do* you think, Flopserino, that he talked about!—Asked me what I thought about the future of the dye industry in America. As I live and breathe, he did! And I grinned at him and told him that I'd overlook the insinuation, and that the dye industry didn't interest me, anyhow so long as an adequate supply of flesh-colored talcum floated in from France occasionally. I thought it was a rather good line. And darned if the poor fish didn't look puzzled for a minute and then blush clear up to the top of his forehead, and begin to *beg my pardon* and say he hadn't meant anything like *that*.—*Bon soir!*

I told the girls about that, and the ones that say he is bashful say that proves it. But I have a little theory of my own. I believe that when he was a younger man he used to be very dissipated, and that he has since reformed or is trying to. I shouldn't be surprised if this cold manner of his is put on as a sort of disguise to keep him from being led into temptation. Still waters run deep, my father always says; and I can well believe that underneath the surface this Benton person is decidedly passionate. It may be that he thought there was some hidden meaning in my joke about *rouge*. Perhaps I awakened some *old memories* of his.

I don't know why I'm wasting all this paper and ink telling you about this Peter Benton person, when I might be handing out some real news, such as the fact that daddy bought me a flame-colored sweater when he went up to town yesterday. The old dear—imagine him shopping for ladies' garments!

Do write soon, Flops! And tell me all about yourself. What did Phil say when—etc., etc., etc.

P. S. I forgot to tell you when I was talking about that Benton chap, that Jimmie Cargyle calls him the Ice Box, and declares he's so exclusive that he ought to have a coat of arms with "Alone at Last!" on it. It makes me ill, that kind of childish humor about a man who has known Life to its bitter dregs.

It was this same Peter Benton who was standing, conscious of nothing in particular, while Cristina Dinant watched him as she chatted with her three musketeers.

"Well, Cris," said Tubby, with an air of proprietorship which he wished he could really feel, "what'll we do now?"

"Do?" she flashed. "Why, swim of course." Cris turned away from the boys and locked arms with her late tennis rival as they strolled along together. It was just like Cris.

"You know, Dorry," said she, "you had me going that second set."

"No, really?" rejoined the other, brightening a little.

" 'S the truth. If you'd only guessed it, you had me running round in circles for a while there."

"Honestly?"

"Absotively and posilutely."

The girls turned in the direction of the beach, while the three smitten swains fell in behind them. As she walked along, Cristina suddenly lost her grip, doubtless accidentally, on one of the tennis balls in her left hand. It bounded off to one side; and as she pounced upon it, Cristina glanced backward, quite casually.

Peter Benton still stood beside the vacated tennis court. But now he was looking at her, gazing fixedly after her.

IT WAS four days after this that Cristina Dinant was paddling lazily along the outer stretch of life-line, which was supported by cork floats and ran parallel to the shore about a hundred yards out. It was near the end of the bathing hour and nearly every one had left the water, either to dress or to take a sun-bath on the beach before dressing. Even the indomitable three were nowhere about for once. Jimmie Cargyle had had to motor his aunt over to a luncheon engagement two towns away. Tubby MacFadyean was suffering that day with an ailment plebeianly known as the stomach ache. And poor little Harry Varnum, with the field left thus providentially clear for him, had been mercilessly dragooned by an older sister to help entertain a girl friend who was visiting her.

Those are the only reasons why Cristina was swimming alone out there by the outer life-line, in twenty feet of water. As a matter of fact, she was not absolutely alone. Peter Benton was only about thirty or forty feet off to one side. They had called to each other a couple of times; but he did not come closer, and that exchange of shouts could hardly be ranked as a conversation. Both were caught and held in the resistless thrill of the sea, its plangent might, the recurrent surge of each great comber as it swept beneath them and plunged shoreward to break in white thunder between them and the sand. Occasionally a wave broke only a few yards inshore of them, and it was that which gave Cristina her idea.

She pondered it for a moment. And as she did so she looked at Peter Benton where he swung lazily through the blue-green water fifteen yards away. He seemed a different man out there. As the sunshine gleamed upon the tense muscles of his glistening forearm and shoulder, Cristina felt a strange sudden electric fire which seemed to dart through her from the piquant little cap on her head to her silk-stockinged toes.

In the arms of the sea one doesn't pause to be judicial or repressive. And Cris was not either naturally. You must never forget that—well or sick, happy or sad—youth and impulse were the two chief characteristics of Cristina Dinant, the mainspring of all her acts. And now she shut her lips firmly and a wicked little smile came into her eyes. And that strange, exultant tingle of the body grew and intensified as she waited for a wave which would suit her purpose.

At last she saw one, marching in and in, towering over its mates which preceded it. Cristina knew instinctively that its extra height would bend and break it almost on top of her. And it did precisely that.

Peter was watching that wave also. And just as it arched for the break, he dived under it. As he came up he heard a gasping cry from the red-capped little figure in the smother of white not far distant. He saw her sputtering, choking, and pawing at the water with frantic, impotent thrusts as the next wave engulfed her. He saw her disappear.

With a mighty, heaving stroke he lunged through the water toward her. As she came up, still gasping and threshing about as if from helplessness, he was almost upon her. He began the last powerful stroke which would bring her within his reach. And then he abruptly paused. For, after all, you must remember that Peter Benton was a keen observer, and his senses were never more acute than in the water. And she was not an actress, but only an eighteen-year-old girl, and also such an instinctive water-nymph that that very quality balked her simulation of helplessness and distress.

Peter Benton paused, treading water. And just the trace of a quizzical smile flickered across his face. Then: "Grab hold of the line. It's only three strokes away," said Peter. He turned and swung leisurely shoreward.

As he did so, Cristina Dinant relaxed into an easy paddle. Her face went white, then crimson. "I hate him! I hate him!" she said aloud through clenched teeth.

And yet, as her eyes followed his graceful, powerful stroke, her look of anger underwent a subtle transformation, though it lost nothing in intensity. And Cargyle, or Tubby, or adoring Harry, would, any one of them, have willingly given a year of life to have her look at him as she gazed after Peter Benton.

AMONG her other blessings Cristina Dinant had one overtopping all the rest—a father. And John Dinant was not just an ordinary father with a single compartment of his heart reserved for his daughter. He was a regular Daddy. His wife had died seven years before, and on their one child, Cristina, he had lavished all the exquisite tenderness and love which only an empty heart can generate. To him, Cristina's any wish was something very akin to law. And he regarded his business as a means to the end of lavishing upon Cris anything and everything she wanted. The great wonder is that she wasn't worse spoiled than she was; for whenever she voiced an inclination it was promptly gratified.

Her high-power, Nile-green Rantoul roadster was an example. Hardly a native or summer colonist but knew, whenever a greenish streak sped past him, that Cris Dinant had been there—and gone. It had become almost a natural phenomenon, like the sunrise or a bolt of lightning.

And so, the day they found Cris just beyond Buttonhook Turn in Center Lyndale, lying crumpled and unconscious on the ground at the edge of the road, beside a malformed heap of Nile-green metal—there was little need to ask who she was or where she lived. The facts soon came out: Cristina had been humming round the turn and had sheered over to the outside edge of the road to accommodate a car rushing from the other direction. At that very instant, just round the sharpest part of the bend, and dead ahead of her, appeared a small boy pushing a wheelbarrow and all-absorbed in the ancient and honorable art of whistling. Even her brakes could not have saved him from utter annihilation. She took the long chance of getting by with one wheel in the ditch. That was like Cris. But it couldn't be done. As the flying Rantoul swerved past the boy, skidded, and turned turtle, it flung her clear, but on to the hard-packed clay of the roadside.

There was no real hospital within forty-five miles, so they rushed her home, while the news sped even before them, and in a twinkling cut short piazza gossip and No Trump bids and jack-knife dives. It grouped people of all sorts and ages into grave, low-voiced little knots.

Within an hour John Dinant was speeding from the city in a special train which also bore a great doctor and two nurses. And though her father found her, in a houseful of weeping servants, there in her own glistening bed which looked out over the sand dunes to the steel-blue Atlantic, it was nearly evening before she opened her eyes and did her best to flash a smile up at him. But such a weak, twisted little smile that it brought the quick moisture to his eyes even before he could turn away. And the long talk he had with the famous physician after he had examined her, did nothing to reassure the father's heart. He began to see ahead a long vista of utter emptiness. The one single thing he found to focus on was the thought that anything which she should wish done during the tiny span of the next few days *must* be done. He drummed it insistently upon the doctor's ears, and the great man found no reason to oppose him.

That night the word went round Beachhampton that Cristina Dinant would die, that there wasn't the slimmest vestige of a chance for her, that it was only a question of time. Many were the hearts that ached that night or raged at the injustice of the Scythe-bearer. Down at the edge of the beach, three silent young men wandered aimlessly beside the waves which thundered like endless booming drums in the darkness. But for once they were not together.

And Cris herself knew that she was to die; knew it in those clear spells during the night when she knew anything at all. But most of the time she wandered aimlessly, her tongue echoing the fancies of her meandering brain.

To the nurse at her bedside it was apparent that she thought herself connected with some book or some play, for she babbled of a princess and a hero called Julian and duels and poignant farewells. And once she murmured in a disconsolate, thick little voice, "O Death, where is thy Sting?" Even the hardened nurse, motionless beside the night-light, was touched and worried and thought of going to wake the doctor.

But soon after, Cris became quieter and hardly spoke or stirred again during the night. At dawn she didn't speak either, just lay and stared out the window a long time. Then suddenly demanded her father.

When he came, she motioned the nurse to leave the room. And then she asked him suddenly and with a touch of her imperiousness: "Daddy—am I going to die?"

He had himself under better control this morning. "No," he lied stoutly, though he made a pretext of fixing the window till he could be sure of himself.

She knew he was not telling the truth. But she gave no sign of it. If that was the way her daddy wanted the matter to rest, well, that was the way he should have it.

That was Cris.

So it was with an astounding smoothness that she went on, "In—that case—it won't do any harm—for me to see—some of the boys—will it?"

Her father was about to refuse, or at least ask the doctor, till he recalled his last night's resolve that she should have whatever she wanted—and in the way she wanted—just so long as she could want.

"Whom do you want to see?"

Through Cristina's brain rang just one name. But she knew her father would wonder too much. She mentioned four: "Jimmie Cargyle—and Tubby MacFadyean—and Harry Varnum—and—" for just a second she hesitated—"and Peter Benton."

John Dinant felt a vague wonder at that last name, but he gave no sign.

"You shall see them."

"Alone—without any old nurse round?"

"Alone."

"Thanks, Daddy."

"I'll send for them right away," said the man, with a sort of relief that there was this something he could do for her.

He did send for them right away. And each of the first three left his breakfast and came hot-haste in the hope that he might be ahead of the other two. As a result, Jimmie and Tubby and Harry all arrived at the Dinant house at the same time. Together they tiptoed into the room and stood beside the big white bed and its occupant whom they had never before seen so still and quiet. All three of them knew the doctor's verdict.

But there was no word or hint of death from either side. What little talk there was came mostly from the boys—about swimming, and Jimmie's new reverse service, and Tubby's bull pup Nero, and Harry's final achievement of rolling a cigaret with one hand.

The lack of heroics, the very every-dayness of the talk, made the scene all the more unendurably pathetic. Finally there came a pause, which lasted and lasted, until fortunately the nurse came back.

"Well, boys, see you again to-morrow! Meanwhile—good-by-ee!" in imitation of the soldier's refrain, said Cris, and somehow managed a smile as they went shuffling out.

Not one of the three spoke. Harry couldn't have spoken anyhow. He was sobbing, openly and unashamed.

Yet no sooner had the trio gone than Cris seemed to forget all about them. She lay listening—listening. Her hands clenched and unclenched. And in her face, drawn with pain though it was, there came the look of placid, starry-eyed resolve that one so often sees in the face of the bride as she walks down the aisle toward her waiting beloved.

And then—the door opened, and the nurse let Peter Benton into the room and quietly withdrew.

For a moment neither spoke. Then, "You sent for me?" said Peter, quiet, very pale and more than ever reserved.

"Yes, Peter," answered Cris, though she had never called him that before. "Sit down," she ordered, "here, right beside me."

The young man went over awkwardly and sat on the edge of the bed as she had asked. His eyes had a strained, troubled look. But he did not speak. In fact, the conversation throughout was not a conversation at all, but a monologue.

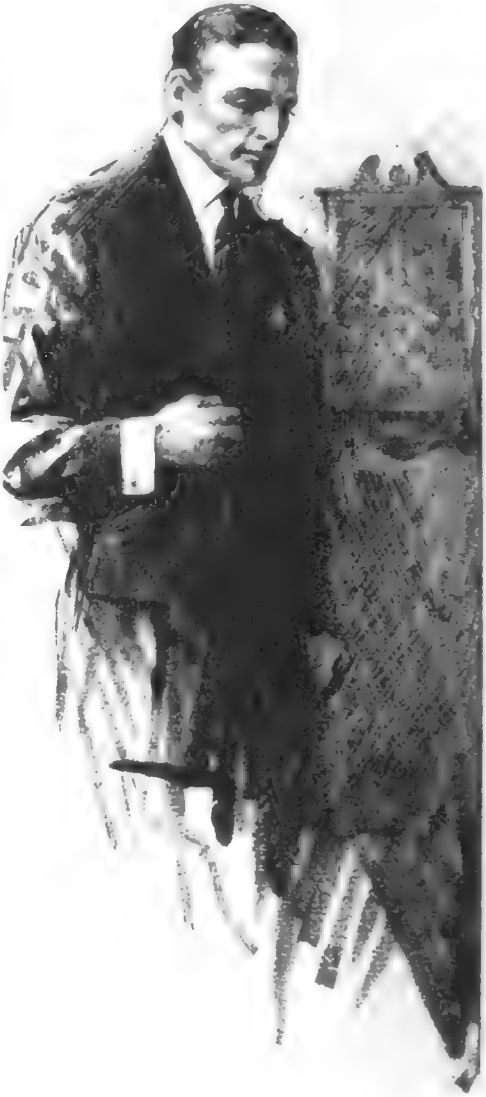
"Peter," said the girl slowly, "Peter, I'm going to die."

He started to speak, but her look fixed on his, stopped him.

"Yes I am, Peter." Her voice was very low and her eyes sweet and grave as she went on. "It's because of that—that I want to tell you—before I die—that—I—I—love you—Peter. I want—you to know."

In the silence the little clock on the mantel seemed to tick more loudly. Peter never spoke, but as he leaned a little toward her, her eyes faltered, then closed. Her two little hands crept up to his face. They half thrust him away, half clasped him closer. And as he bent, and his lips touched hers for one fleeting but age-long instant, her two arms clung and held him tight.

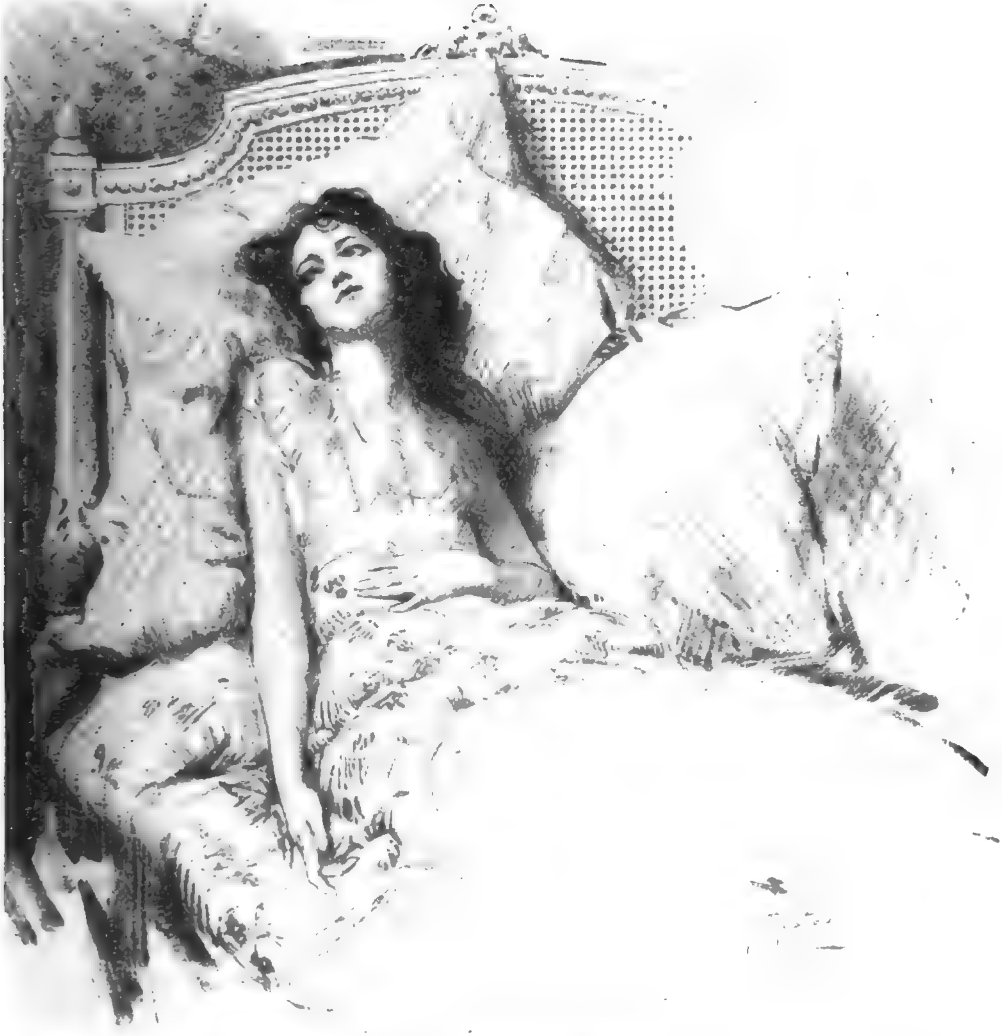
A moment after, and the room was empty, save for the little eighteen-year-old girl whose stifled, happy sobbing mingled with the ticking of a clock on the mantel. . . .



"Peter," said the girl slowly, "I am
die—that I love

That night Cris was far less restless than she had been the night before. But the nurse at her side assumed that the girl was again wandering, when she heard the whisper out of the darkness, "O Death—where is thy Sting!"

Yet this time, instead of being vague and



going to die. It's because of that—that I want to tell you—before I you—Peter. I want—you to know."

unfocussed, the words seemed to have a definite ring of triumph in them.

AMONG the gods on Olympus there is one whose pet whimsey is the humiliation of physicians and the toppling over of their pronunciamentos. And on this occasion it suited his mood to work hand in glove with the two gods who look after the lot of girls and fathers, respectively. The three of them together did an altogether admirable job.

In other words, despite learned prophecies and tragic forebodings, Cristina Dinant proceeded to get well.

Not very fast or very spectacularly, but steadily, insistently. And at the news, even the most mealy-mouthed of Beachhampton's natives and summer colonists expressed pleasure. The rest registered rapture.

John Dinant was like a fond old mother who hears that her sailor lad has been spared from the tempest. He fluttered about, performing foolish missions and getting underfoot, till the nurse rejoiced every time he had to go up to town.

Cristina's room became a bower of fruit and flowers. And the number of would-be callers finally made the nurse rise in her wrath and demand some limitations upon such unheard-of laxity during the convalescence period. But among the elect, the three cavaliers were there oftenest. With Cristina's recovery, all their rivalry flared up anew. Each would try to steal a march on the other two by calling at some odd hour, with the result that they often landed in together. They would vie with one another in giving her something new and novel to eat or look at or smell or play with.

It was Jimmie Cargyle who was responsible for the large, willow cage containing a sleek, white rabbit with pink eyes. Cris laughed till she cried at the way they all seemed to think that her illness had somehow set her back about ten years in age. Tubby and Harry both flooded her with jig-saw puzzles, till Tubby scored an unmistakable win by slipping among them a large photograph of himself sliced into bits. After which, Harry switched to wire puzzles and gave her a collection of twenty.

Truly, Cris should not have lacked for diversion. Yet, when her room was empty and still, it was a very thoughtful and dejected and even worried little maid—quite unlike her usual resilient self—who lay staring out her windows at the rolling dunes and flat, blue ribbon of the sea.

Peter had never come again, had uttered no syllable. Yet it was not of him, but of herself, her past act and the future when she again began to play about with the crowd, that she pondered and fretted over.

She tried to imagine how mature Eight-and-Twenty or steady-going Eight-and-Thirty would have felt and behaved under the same circumstances. She got no clue. She could only think and think, in a perpetual welter of shame and horror over the thing she had done.

Not that her feelings toward Peter had changed an iota. If she had still thought she was going to die, she would act the same way again. And, merely by themselves, those two minutes with Peter were enshrined in the inmost tabernacle of her memory. But now to go and get well! That was the rub! The mere thought of meeting him again casually for the first time, of encountering him day after day, made her flush hotly.

Lying there hour after hour, brooding over it, brought her a decision, the nearest to a remedy which she could find. As a consequence, the next day found her writing and sending the following note:

> Dear Mr. Benton:
>
> There is so little to do during these days when I am stalling round waiting to be let out once more, that I am writing to all my friends to kill time. And naturally I include you among them.
>
> I little thought when I took my Rantoul roadster out that day, ten days ago, what was going to happen. And those first two or three days after the accident were a perfect nightmare. I must have been delirious most of the time then. I vaguely remember imagining and saying all sorts of extraordinary things. I must have made an awful idiot of myself, particularly when my friends came in to call on me. My nurse tells me that you were among those who came to see me. I certainly appreciate that, even though at the time I may have hurt your feelings by not recognizing you. I got people all mixed up those days—mistook lots of them for daddy, and probably said all sorts of funny things while I wandered in my mind.
>
> But after all, I guess everybody is equally confused about identities and what they say and do when they're delirious. So I'm sure you'll excuse me if I didn't seem properly appreciative of your presence when you called. For I really *was* glad to see you.

She considered that last a master-stroke of successful duplicity. The letter ended:

> How is the surf these days? I certainly am looking forward to getting back into it again. And I won't be so very long now.
>
> Very sincerely yours,
>
> Cris.

Considering the blind alley she felt herself trapped in, Cristina felt that she had done pretty well with that letter. Anyhow, it relieved her to some degree for the time being. But no answer of any sort came back, and again Cristina grew dejected to such an extent that the kindly family doctor and her father both began to ask her if there was anything special troubling her. This query, with its hint of what perhaps all the world was noticing, so alarmed Cristina that she grabbed her pen and scribbled to the never-failing Florence Newhall:

> DEAR FLOPS:
> I'm better right along—going outdoors soon, the M. D. says. But I'm bluer than indigo all the time—though Lord knows why. But I am.
> Won't you run down for a week and cheer me up? Please, Flops. Don't say No. Just grab the pink kimono and ditto slippers and come.
> CRIS.
> P. S. We furnish guest tooth brushes!

And Flops Newhall did come, and promptly.

She was the best sort of person that you can imagine as a cheerer-up for such a time. Quiet, shrewd, with a humorous mouth and an eye that missed nothing, she was a girl who could tell how many beans make five without first studying agriculture or calculus. In short, "Flops" Newhall was a wise girl. And efficient withal. She got quite chummy with Cristina's nurse, who was soon leaving, and heard lots of things about the first days after the accident which Cristina hadn't mentioned.

Cris began to go out again, and little by little to get back into the old life of the colony. And with Florence's benign proximity, she became more like her old self. Florence was with her when she first encountered Peter Benton again, and a sudden surprising burst of loquaciousness from the usually quiet Flops had eased the situation.

But as Cris's tension in that direction slackened up a bit just because of the lapse of time and frequent stereotyped encounters with Peter, the old unappeasable flame began to burn into her heart again, hotter and hotter. But there was nothing that she could do, except to keep away from him more and more and curse her folly in ever having jumped at the conclusion that she was on her death-bed, and acting on that premise.

HOWEVER, she was improving so fast that she got more and more into the old round of festivities. It was just a week after Florence's arrival that the pair went to a beach party.

Now as you know, every beach party at night begins with eats, progresses to the driftwood fire stage, and finally winds up in endless songs, stunts, or stories. And this beach party ran absolutely true to form. It had passed the song fest and had quieted down to the story stage.

They were sitting in a ring, using the falling stick as a means of determining each successive entertainer. Every beach-party devotee must often have done this. You merely hold a straight bit of driftwood with one end on the sand, and then let go. The person toward whom it points when it has fallen is thereby elected as next story-teller or stunt artist. As they worked it at these beach parties, the victim was given an interval of preparation by being permitted to go and return from the Big Rock, a huge boulder which lay two hundred yards up the beach.

Cris was almost happy. Her Three Musketeers were there, as close to her as they could get. Peter Benton was there also, more self-contained than ever. In fact, as you must have realized before this, Peter Benton was neither a snob nor an iceberg, but one of the most acutely bashful young men in the world. Needless to say, Cris had taken pains to seat herself on the opposite side of the ring from him. Things were steaming along nicely; for the first victim had found profitable inspiration in the walk up to Big Rock and back.

Florence Newhall had been watching closely that device of the falling stick. Suddenly she spoke up:

"Why limit the choice to the person that only one end of the stick points to? Why not use *both* ends of the stick and let two people go off and work up a stunt together?"

The suggestion was hailed as a veritable inspiration; partly because it came from a guest, more because it was something new.

Before any dissenting voice could be raised, Florence herself seized the bit of driftwood, poised it with one end against the sand, apparently perfectly prependicular. She let go. For a second it hung—balanced, then fell with one end directed toward Cristina.

The other end pointed across the ring—straight at Peter Benton!

The crowd chorused orthodox glee, as it would have done however the stick had fallen. "Ah-ha, Crissy! You and Peter!"

it chortled. Close at her ear, Tubby MacFadyean, thinking to make a hit, whispered, "Tough luck, old thing!"

But Cris hardly heard him. She was watching Peter scramble awkwardly to his feet. She cast one quick look at Florence Newhall; but that young lady, who had proposed this innovation and had held the stick, was staring into the heart of the fire, apparently intent on something therein.

But Cris was game. She never flinched. Springing to her feet, she joined Peter, and together they swung off into the half-darkness toward the big rock which was their goal. The laughing voices behind them dwindled. Looking back, Cris could see the ring of figures silhouetted blackly against the rosy glow of the fire. The voices finally ebbed out. She was alone with Peter for the first time since that morning he had stepped softly into her room.

Cristina began to talk, incessantly, inanely, questioning him about what possible stunt they could work up for the crowd. But Peter said never a word, merely strode along with his hands thrust into his pockets.

At last they reached the rock. A half-moon gave them light enough to see each other faintly. Peter faced her. He drew from his pocket the letter—the foolish little letter—which Cris had sent him. As she recognized it, he spoke for the first time.

"Is what this letter says true, or isn't it?" His voice was almost harsh.

Cris hesitated. She couldn't say no—She wouldn't. And to say yes—that was just as bad. Finally, "What does it matter?" she breathed.

"Right!" said he with a strange thrill in his voice. "What *does* it matter? What does anything matter—except that I love you—have always loved you?"

And for the second time in their lives her hands went out to him. And as he clasped her to him close and closer, once again their lips met, and this time lingered.

"GEE! They're a long time about their rehearsal," remarked Jimmie Cargyle beside the beach fire.

"Come on? We'll go bring 'em back," said Tubby.

The pair scrambled to their feet. Nothing daunted, Harry Varnum joined them, and the trio scuffed off through the sand. On their way they decided to steal up softly, with the chance of getting a line on the prospective yarn or stunt. They tiptoed up behind the boulder and peered round. The glimmering moonlight showed them Cris and Peter seated on the sand. His back was against the boulder. She lay in the curve of his arm and her head was on his shoulder. And his manner, in the eyes of his erstwhile critics, was not in the least like the ice-box they had called him.

They didn't seem to be talking much or planning anything. And yet, what the boys heard sent them tiptoeing away.

Stricken, the astounded trio somehow progressed toward the beach party. And, on the way, not one of them spoke a single word.

The crowd round the fire looked up, surprised to see the three back unaccompanied.

"Well?" said somebody.

They stood silent. Tubby MacFadyean first found his voice. "They—they aren't quite ready yet," he murmured.

The Newhall girl glanced up at him with that quizzical smile of hers. Then she stared contentedly into the fire again.

"I don't imagine they'll be ready for quite a while," said she, half to herself.

And, as usual Flops Newhall was right. It was an exceedingly long time before the couple returned to the party. And in the interval Cristina had made a notable discovery. As she phrased it to Peter himself, it was this:

"Dying in your sweetheart's arms may be all very well in its way, but it's pretty stupid compared to living there!"

Just what is Fame, Success? Have you ever
thought about it? This is the problem behind

"The Urge" By Maryland Allen

A story out of the ordinary which will appear in

September EVERYBODY'S *Out August 15*

Slave of the Pit

Queer Things that Happen to the Mind—a Puzzling Problem for Scientists, in Fictional Form

By Bertram Atkey

THE gravel-diggers had been working on a pocket of coarse, pale-yellow sand at the bottom of the steeply sloping twelve-foot bank of the sand-pit, and, leaning over the edge of the excavation, Aire's mate called to know if he had finished.

Aire, scraping together the last of the pocket and without looking up, shouted that there was just a barrowful left.

"We'll have this bit, George, and then we'll git along to the Hen and have a drop o' beer!" he called, his voice sounding muffled in the little cellar-like excavation.

"All right, chuck it up!"

On the crest of the sand-bank a line of flaring scarlet poppies that had dreamed motionless in the hot, airless sunshine throughout the day quivered and shook their garish heads, as though a little breeze had touched them, and a tiny cascade of dry sand poured down into the pit at the foot of the bank with a soft hissing sound, drowned by the shearing note of Aire's sharp-edged, polished shovel as it cut into the remaining pile.

But neither of the men saw the soundless warning of the awakened poppies nor heard the trickle of the little sand fall.

And as Aire's knee, pressing against the back of his right hand, drove the shovel forward for the last time in that place, the flowers all moved bodily forward. For a second they moved in silence. Then a dull and immense hissing, intensifying to a muffled rumbling, drove heavily up from the pit into the sunny silence, and the sand-bank caved in. The mass seemed to move solidly and with extraordinary swiftness, so that it had engulfed the stooping man to the throat before he could cry out. Heavy lumps of the foot-deep stratum of gravel above the sand and the dark grass-covered topsoil that rested on the gravel came rolling sluggishly in the flow down, and as the sand writhed and lapped up over the head of the buried man, one of these hard jagged lumps struck him heavily above the temple. Then a great slab of sand cracked from the bank, crumbled and poured down on all, piling high over the pinned body, and was still.

A cloud of dust floated heavily up, and Martin was alone, staring with eyes of horror at the filled pit, at the débris of fragments of straw from the vanished tunnels of the sand-martins' nests, the half-buried lumps of hard yellowish gravel and the big clay-encrusted stones that crowned the deeply packed sand.

He turned to the fields, crying out, and beckoned wildly to two farm-hands not far away, who, startled by the ominous rumble at the sand-pits, had stopped work and were staring dully at Martin. They came running.

"Aire! Aire!" cried Martin, pointing wildly.

"Buried?"

"Aye, all of a sudden," sobbed Martin. They began to dig furiously.

ONCE before, during his ten years of work on the sand and in the adjoining gravel-pits, James Aire had been caught unawares and buried by a sand-slide, but that had meant no more than a day "off." This time it was more serious because of the wound on his head.

They had taken him to his cottage close by and left him to his wife and the doctor. He lay there a week in a darkened room, aching and sick, with a strange and agonizing confusion in his head.

Probably because he had been the victim of a novel or uncommon accident his wife received a good many callers, but of these—mostly his friends and cronies, country working men, of the Hen and Chickens, the beer-house at the edge of the village—none, by the doctor's orders, was admitted.

But the doctor's orders were forgotten when Miss Eleanor Malton called, bringing such things as she conceived would be acceptable to a sick laboring man.

Eleanor Malton, the only daughter of the local big landowner, Sir Edward Malton, now dead, was Aire's employer and landlord, the owner of the sand and gravel-pits, and the Aires were said to be favorites of hers, though why they should be (complained the people of Malton village) it was difficult to understand. For they knew, if Miss Eleanor did not, what a dour, ignorant, morose man Aire was, and how colorless and slatternly his wife.

"I s'pose there's some sort o' reason why Jim Aire and his missis always gets the right side o' Miss Eleanor," one would grumble enviously to his wife, "but I'm dashed if I can tell why. For he's a great sulking hulk of a man, hardly civil to a soul, and as ignorant as ar'n in the place."

"And everybody knows that his wife ain't but a sloven," would come the prompt reply.

The people of the village had been too long accustomed to the sight of James Aire among them, in his gravel-stained corduroys tied at the knees, his coarse colorless boots, to realize that he was in any notable degree different from any other working man. His darkly bronzed, rarely clean-shaven face, his bare brown arms, his great calloused hands, his collarless, muscular neck and his dark, dusty hair were sufficiently like those of his circle of friends at the Hen to excite no comment.

The village accepted James Aire for what he seemed to be; one of themselves, a little rougher than a painter or carpenter, no rougher than a bricklayer or a farm-hand.

But Eleanor Malton knew otherwise. She had painted Aire working in the fierce raw yellows and reds of the gravel, splashed in a staring blaze against the gray-green and purple shadows of the pines beyond the pit, too often not to have realized how superior to the average physique was that of the gravel-digger.

Understanding anatomy as every painter must, she knew that the man was handsome and unusually symmetrical.

For a long time now the pits had held a strange fascination for her, and she was no child, but a woman of twenty-five with a wide circle of friends in her own world and with a niche in the much narrower world of art. At twenty-five she was still unmarried. She lacked neither beauty nor wealth, but she had not yet met a man to whom it seemed worth while surrendering her freedom. She spent her time, as the inclination moved her, between Malton Manor and her London flat.

There was nothing of charm in the fascination of the pits, and when the men were not working there she did not often go near them.

It was on the days when the sun struck out from a cloudless sky and the air quivered with heat and the flowers stood still with drooping heads or stared with wide eyes straight into the intolerable blaze that she liked best of all to indulge her strange fancy, and dressed carefully for coolness would walk slowly through the hot shadows of the pine-woods, resonant with insect life, and come out upon the pits, there to find Aire—and perhaps one or two others, though she hardly noticed these—working on the gravel. Packed, pressed, beaten down with the stress of a million storms, stamped by the passage of innumerable years into the density and solidity of iron, the yellow stuff yielded only to the brute force of the heavy iron bars wielded by Aire.

He would drive the great bar down again and again into the same slowly deepening hole until at last he was able to lever off a big block and send it crashing down over the edge of the terrace, or small cliff at the foot of which waited his mate to disintegrate the caked stuff in readiness to throw it with shovels against the screen, a grating of iron fixed upon wheels, which would sieve it into grades, the fine for garden paths, "seconds" for rather heavier work, and the "rough" to be used for the water-bound highroads.

There was always a strange, acrid and savage odor investing this labor, the curious hot smell of smashed flint mingled with that of perspiration. She hated it, but it remained always in her mind as the true odor of physical force, an odd idea but one that was fixed. Just as the sight of the tawny yellow pits always made her think of lions—that was due to the color and the waste, desert-like appearance of the pits; so any mention of sheer force always brought to her mind a memory of smashed flint, heavy iron bars, bare, reddish-yellow, muscle-corded arms and perspiration.

It was the sudden realization of great strength being put forth, forced upon her mind by this odor, which had impelled her to notice Aire physically, and the first glance brought her a wonder that she had not noticed the physical perfection of this man before.

That he was immensely strong she knew, and that such strength was only possible in a perfect physique was obvious. But she saw with a species of surprise that he was graceful. His head was well shaped, his ears small and well set. His lean, dark, hawk-like face, she realized, would be handsome if it were cleaned of the yellow dust, the starting perspiration, the bristling five days' growth of stiff black hair on the jutting chin and the muscular throat. Through the open front of the coarse shirt she glimpsed a mighty chest, and the breadth of his shoulders spoke of the iron arch below. His powerful arms were neither too short nor too long, and she saw from his firm and easy balance on the edge of the cliff that his lower limbs must be proportionate.

Yes, he was a fine brute, a superb machine. Something worth sketching. And that was all. She knew that he was nothing more.

He could neither read nor write, and for all the evidence of intelligence his daily life showed, he might have been almost wholly devoid of reason. He worked all day, ate an enormous meal of coarse strong food, and after his meal, without changing his clothes, often without washing, he went to the Hen and Chickens and spent the evening in pouring down his throat as much and as strong sweet beer as he could afford to purchase after providing for the needs of his domestic life.

Soulless, ignorant, intellectually dead, or unborn, a human machine, a mechanical thing that dug gravel in a reek of smashed flint or the stuffy, dusty smell of fine dry sand and perspiration. A slave of the gravel, of the pit. She was often oppressed with a sense of the horrible waste of it: this fine, this perfect human mechanism chained to a fate which offered nothing better throughout its whole span of endurance than a rending, a tearing and a shifting of senseless, lifeless stuff that was only really slightly valuable, because it was suitable for putting upon the roads.

She pitied Aire, who would have been no more than dully surprised had he known.

THE doctor was not wholly satisfied with the wound in Aire's head, and he decreed a month's rest, more if necessary, at the expense of the insurance company which protected Eleanor Malton against the accident claims of her workmen.

A week after the sand-slide Aire was sitting in a wooden chair at his cottage door, smoking. Inside, his wife was moving slipshod about the kitchen living-room preparing the midday meal. It was a glorious day in mid-June, drenched with sunshine. Aire was staring with a deep frown at a clump of larkspur in brilliantly blue full flower. There was a puzzled expression in his dark eyes. Once he glanced up at the sky, once he turned to stare at a red rose close by, once he eyed the water-butt at a corner of the cottage. Then his gaze returned to the blue flowers.

Presently his wife came out. She was a woman with that pale, prematurely blighted air peculiar to the excessively inbred, under-nourished women of the remoter small villages of England, where every one is more or less related and new blood is rare. She stopped by the chair, holding a bowl of vegetable refuse.

"How is it now, Jim?" she asked rather tonelessly.

Aire stirred.

"Getting on. Been looking at the flowers," he said, his eyes still fixed on the delphinium blooms.

"Eh, the flowers? Yes, they'm very

pretty," she replied, without much interest.

"They'm very blue. Can't think why one flower's one color and another flower's another color. Look at that rose. He's red, and that logspur's blue, and they both grows in the same ground and haves the same rain. Why ain't they both blue or both red?"

A look of sheer amazement crept into the faded blue eyes of the woman. She gaped at her husband, and something like an expression of fear flickered across her dull, once pleasing face. What was the matter with Jim—wondering about flowers? She hesitated, her mouth open. Then her face cleared. The doctor was right. Her husband was not himself yet—that was it.

"I dunno, I'm sure, logspur is blue, roses is mostly red. That's their nature," she answered at last.

"I know that, but I was wondering why it's their nature," he said.

"I dunno, Jim—they always was like that, and always will be, I reckon."

She moved out to throw the cabbage leaves over to a few fowls in a small run, and Aire's eyes followed her. His frown deepened.

"Your dress is open at the back," he said as she returned. "And your shoes is fallin' off your feet. Ain't you got any better shoes?"

A dull flush spread slowly over her face, and again she stared, her mouth open.

But Aire had returned to the problem of the flowers.

She went indoors with the look of one half-dazed, half-startled. It was long since Aire had commented on her appearance.

Presently the gravel-digger gave up the puzzle, and his eyes fell to his own boots, huge, heavy, dull brownish-gray, covered with scratches, obviously never blackened nor polished. He scowled. His glance traveled along his yellow-stained corduroy trousers, worn, creased, tied with string below the knees, intensely ugly, and his scowl deepened.

He glanced round at the doorway as though on the point of calling his wife, but paused at sight of a motor sliding down the road toward the cottage.

It was the doctor's car, a new car, Aire saw. Still frowning, he watched it glide to a standstill at the gate.

The doctor, a big middle-aged, good-looking man, stepped out and paused to walk round the car. He was evidently very proud of his new purchase, a smart landaulet with the rather long bonnet of a six-cylinder engine.

Rather hastily Aire got up and walked down to the gate.

"Morning, Aire," said the doctor, looking up from the engine. He had opened the bonnet apparently for no real reason except secretly to admire the well-finished work.

"Morning, sir."

"Feeling better?"

"I'm all right now, Doctor."

"Ha—we'll see. How d'you like the look of the car?"

"She'll be a bit more comfortable of a cold night than your old one, Doctor."

"She will." The doctor laughed. He had just abandoned his open Ford.

"How do they work, Doctor?" asked the gravel-digger, with the air of a curious child.

Doctor Baynton glanced at him, then smiled.

"Oh, very simply, Aire, when one gets the hang of it." He had only got the hang of it himself quite recently. As much to reassure himself that he knew the system of the internal combustion engine as to satisfy Aire he explained cursorily.

"Oh, I see, Doctor," said the gravel-digger. The doctor glanced at him, for it sounded as though the man really did see. It was impossible that any man could get from the doctor's slurred explanation anything but the sketchiest idea of the mechanism of a motor, and Aire was about the last man to be capable of that. Doctor Baynton had always regarded Aire, on the rare occasions when he thought of him at all, as wholly a "clod." A well-made, and healthy clod, but practically mindless.

Yet there was a brightness of intelligence in the gravel-digger's face.

"Well, I'll have a look at the head," said the doctor, and went with his patient to the cottage.

Baynton lingered over the examination, though the reason for any delay was not very apparent. The torn flesh was healing well in spite of the bruise. But what concerned the doctor was the curious suggestion of a denting of the unbroken bone of the skull under the flesh wound. It was as though one had taken a mushroom-headed steel punch and driven it hard against the bone, making a roughly circular, very slight concavity perhaps an eighth of an inch deep. It was a curious result for any blow, and novel to Baynton, who feared that there might be set up a dangerous pressure on the brain.

He ascertained with a deft question or two that pains had gone, and the dull, hard confusion had cleared.

"My head's better and clearer than it was before, Doctor," said Aire gravely.

His wife, who had been watching the examination with uneasy eyes, gave unexpected corroboration.

"He's thinking of things that he never used to think of," she said.

"What sort of things?" asked Baynton.

"Well, fanciful things," she said reluctantly. "Why logspurs be blue and roses red when they grows on the same ground and haves the same water. 'Tis their nature, I tells him."

"Eh?" The doctor frowned. Then he laughed a little. "Well, well, speculations of that sort will do no harm. Healthy things, flowers." He turned. "Take it easy, Aire, for a little. I'll come in again to-morrow."

THE Aires watched him go down the path, a wholesome, handsome man, very trim in his well-cut tweeds and brightly polished dark-brown boots.

"I don't see why I shouldn't have a pair o' boots like that, missus," said Aire slowly.

She stared, then laughed with a touch of bitterness.

"Nice things they'd look after a day in the gravel-pit, too," she said.

Aire grinned rather sheepishly as his wife moved to her work again. He noticed that she had changed her shoes and that the opening that had gaped at the back of her shabby skirt was closed.

He turned to stare with a new and swiftly increasing distaste at his boots and clothes.

A small white cloud made its appearance in the burnished sky and he watched it for a long time until his attention was caught by the bees that boomed industriously about the flowers. These, too, he studied attentively, even taking his chair nearer to the clump of delphiniums in order to note their movements more closely. The hooting of a distant motor distracted him, and his thoughts went back to the doctor's little lecture.

His lips moved as, with his eyes fixed on infinity, he slowly repeated word for word precisely the doctor's explanation of the car's mechanism.

But that was a feat of memory of which the James Aire of a week before was wholly incapable!

He did not seem to realize this.

His wife appeared at the door.

"Dinner's ready, Jim," she said, and they sat down to eat.

"You can read, can't you?" asked Aire presently.

"Read, yes."

"Who learned you?" he continued.

"Learned at the school."

"I wish I had learned," said Aire. "For there must be a lot in books."

"Oh, I dunno. I never got much by reading," replied his wife.

Aire looked doubtful. He came from a family that lived deep in the New Forest, on the skirts of which Malton village had grown, and though not more than forty years old he had been, as a boy, too far out of reach for the educational net of forty years ago.

He had not often regretted his inability to read or write, though, on a memorable occasion, visiting Salisbury fair with a few friends, he had been acutely conscious of his inability to make any sense of the forest of sign-boards over the shops, the posters, the tickets and announcements in the shop-windows, even the flaring lies on the garishly painted boards of the many side-shows of the fair. But the feeling of inferiority and confusion which this had caused him had soon been assuaged by beer.

But this present hunger to learn to read was of a different nature. Since he had left his bed he had become aware of a novel desire to know things, and he was convinced that it was within the covers of books that he must look for knowledge.

He ate silently. He would have liked to ask his wife to teach him to read, but a curious reluctance, a shyness, restrained him.

After the meal he returned to his chair and the teeming puzzles that met his eyes in every direction. The drowsy afternoon went swiftly for him, as he fretted mentally at the mysteries he had never noticed before, the mystery of the flowers, the bees, the cloud, the journey of the sun across the heavens, the waxing and waning and everlasting changing of the shadows cast by his cottage, why gravel was so hard to dig and sand so easy, a host of things, and each one a profound mystery. In the heart of all pricked and stung like a small thorn a resentful wonder as to how it was that the doctor should wear such clean and comfortable clothes while he, Aire, seemed to be doomed to his stiff and filthy corduroy.

The key to each he felt was in the books, and it was when he saw Miss Malton approaching the cottage late in the afternoon, obviously with the intention of inquiring as to his progress, that he formed a great resolve.

He would ask her how one learned to read.

Probably it was not difficult. Children could do it—most of the men frequenting the Hen and Chickens could do it. And there wasn't a man of them that he could not wear down in a long day's work—weak as rats, some of them, while he had always been strong as a bull. Certainly, then, if they could learn to read he could.

His heart quickened with the excitement of anticipation as he gripped the wooden arms of the chair, watching Eleanor Malton as she strolled toward him.

SHE was instantly aware that his accident had subtly changed the gravel-digger, though she was far from realizing how immense that change was. She had heard from Doctor Baynton that he was uneasy about that peculiar indentation of the bone.

"There is not much room to spare in any skull, despite the humorists," he had said. "Pressure on the brain is more easily caused than most people guess, and no one knows precisely what effect the slightest pressure may have."

She wondered whether the singular brightness in the eyes of the gravel-digger, hitherto so heavy-eyed, was an effect of pressure. Later, she was to know.

"Good evening, Aire," she said, smiling. "How are you now?"

"Better, miss, thank you." He stood up. "Fit to go to work again."

"There is no hurry for that, Aire," she said. "You must make the most of your rest. Are you so fond of the gravel-pit that you are anxious to get back already?"

He did not answer at once, but stood gazing at her, through her rather, for his eyes were absent with thought.

"I don't know about that," he said. "Until to-day I never thought much about anything outside the pit. But things keep coming up in my mind to-day, miss—new things."

His wife spoke from his side.

"Wondering about things, Miss Eleanor. Why the flowers be blue and red, and clouds and the sun going over the bees." He was getting over his shyness at hearing his thoughts put into words.

"Well, why shouldn't I?" he said. "There's no harm in learning about things, is there, miss?"

Eleanor laughed.

"Harm?" she said. "It is the wisest thing in all the world to do."

The lean face of the gravel-digger flamed darkly.

"Then—then you wouldn't mind me asking you how I could learn to read while I'm out of the pit, Miss Eleanor," he said with some excitement.

At the very point of promising to do this easy, generous, charitable, even humane thing for him she hesitated, checked, and was silent. Her smile disappeared swiftly as a blown candle flame, her eyes widened a little, and her face became grave.

For most mysteriously and unaccountably it seemed to her that a low voice had spoken sharply in her mind.

"Be careful," said the voice. "Beware of what you do for this man!" And vague, soundless, magic though the voice or impulse was, yet it was heavily fraught with warning.

For a moment she stared absently, like one who listens for a sound that is diminishing in the distance.

But the voice or instinct came no more, though she still vibrated like a plucked string from that startlingly swift warning.

Aire and his wife were waiting, looking at her with a certain surprise at her hesitation. She ignored her roused instincts and smiled again.

"Of course I will help you, Aire," she said. "It's quite simple. I will see Mr. Bryce on my way home and arrange for him to give you an hour every evening."

Bryce was the village schoolmaster, underpaid, rendered ambitionless by the utterly soulless system under which he was compelled to work, and no doubt he would be glad to make the money.

Aire was grateful.

"Thank you, Miss Eleanor," he said, deeply flushing. "It'll mean a lot of good to me." Unconsciously he straightened himself, his eyes shining straight into Eleanor Malton's.

It occurred to her that his gaze was oddly bright and penetrating now, and in spite of his uncouth and shapeless clothes he looked like a man who was not to be held down forever in the class of manual laborers to which he had been born.

The deep-down class instinct of the aristocrat raised its head defensively within her. But she beat the vague resentfulness back at once, for she knew that it was the evil residue of a moribund habit of thought nurtured by the tradition of many ages. She looked steadily at the gravel-digger, and knew that she was right to help this man out from the morass of ignorance, in which he had been condemned by custom and his own lack of intellectual enterprise, to live for the best of his youth.

Hard on the receding wave of warning came now a shining and splendid resolve: she would make this man, this digger of gravel!

If only his suddenly awakened intellect were equal to his physique he was well worth helping. And he had changed extraordinarily since his accident. Before he had been of no more account than a finely shaped, good, powerful cart-horse; but now something had dawned on his face.

Absorbed by her sudden enthusiasm she looked him up and down as though he were indeed an animal, appraising him; then she studied his face, as though he were a criminal and she a judge, weighing him. She wondered whether under his bandages he had a good forehead. She fancied he had—she remembered almost certainly that he had. But, in any case, an hour with Bryce would prove whether it was worth while.

Her gaze turned to the wife, and the light of her resolve wavered and dimmed a little. Was this woman, this untidy, slatternly, narrow-faced, bloodless woman, capable of going up with her husband? She wondered. In her heart she knew that she was not. But also she knew that almost every woman has in her a strange reserve of spiritual strength and tenacity, though many live their whole lives through without drawing upon it.

Mrs. Aire might have it. If she had, so much the better. If she had not, Aire must do as other men had done: carry her with him.

She spoke again.

"Yes, I will help you," she said, and inspired by her decision she went on: "If you wish to raise yourself, Aire, if you wish to do, to achieve, something in the world better than digging gravel, and have the ability, I will help you."

Impulsively she offered him her hand. It was like a flower within the scaled and horny grip of the hand which held it for a second.

"You, too," said Eleanor Malton, turning toward Mrs. Aire.

But the eyes of the gravel-digger's wife seemed to have hardened and to have taken on a look that was almost fear and hatred.

THE hour with Bryce, the schoolmaster, produced a surprising corroboration of Eleanor Malton's theory supported by Doctor Baynton, that Aire had been mentally changed and incredibly improved by some strange freak of bone pressure upon the brain.

He amazed Bryce, for he took in the elements of reading literally at a gulp. The schoolmaster from the first needed only to explain a thing once, and it was snatched up by the new amazing memory of the gravel-digger, never to be forgotten. By the end of the hour which, made absorbing, even thrilling, for the schoolmaster by the unprecedented avidity and mental power of his pupil, ran into two, Aire was finding many of his explanations by a kind of unerring guesswork, instinct or a swift and curiously flexible logic.

Bryce hurried him on, wondering, secretly endeavoring to bring him to a check, to find a limitation of this ability, so marked as to be unconsciously arrogant. But he failed. Aire took all and appeared to yawn for more. It was so also with writing, and the flavor of bitterness habitual to Bryce vanished in his interest in watching the grim control by Aire's will of the large calloused hand as it drove a pencil through the pothook entanglements of the first stage.

"You've done well, Aire. It's very surprising," said the schoolmaster at last. "Why you have allowed all this ability to lie dormant while you toiled up at the pits is beyond me." He sighed, and filled his pipe.

"However, I'll do what I can for you. But if you go on at this rate you'll be using my poor fund of knowledge up within a space of weeks, though I'll give you a run for your money, my man." His eyes lit up, and he stared hard at Aire through the cloud of smoke that he puffed through his bearded lips. "I'll give you a run for your money," he repeated. "There was a time when I was not so bad a scholar—not so bad. Come again to-morrow night."

Aire was pleased, but not elated. It was with a species of complacence that he left Bryce's house and went homeward, reveling in this new vision and sword-edged keenness of thought which had been born within him.

HIS way lay past the Hen and Chickens, and it occurred to him to go in.

The bare room, furnished only with wooden tables and forms, with one or two settles, chairs and a few garishly printed but stained and flyblown advertisements of spirits, was full of old friends.

If he still needed proof that he had now intellectually ascended completely out of reach of this plane of the social life of the village, he received it the instant he crossed the familiar threshold.

He was received with friendliness, but without enthusiasm, answered the few rough inquiries as to his accident, ordered a pint of the worthless beer they were drinking, and sat down silently to listen.

Within ten minutes he was chilled with a feeling that was almost horror.

The talk was continuous, but without meaning. For by far the greater part it dealt with the self-evident and unimportant. It was practically devoid of humor though the company appeared to think otherwise. The coarser the gossip or the jests, the more abundant the mirth. But the jests were always ancient, and the "humor" of the gossip almost always was to be found in the discomfiture of some person: a man might have bested a woman, a woman may have tricked some man, or one man may have outwitted another man. A had sold B a calf that died the day after B paid for it and received it, as everybody except B knew it would. This drew forth much raucous laughter, and many expressions of admiration for A's ability. C, a village coquette, who for some years had chosen or disdained at her pleasure, had finally come to the old troublous end of her coquetry, thanks to her passion for a smart young mechanic who had been sojourning temporarily in the village.

The company were greatly amused and gratified at this downfall; for many of them had suffered rebuffs from the belle. Such things as that.

Listening with his new intelligence, Aire fancied he could trace, pervading the colorless fabric of the gossip, a vague and bitter malice and an ever-present envy. It seemed to him that these men envied A the money he had achieved for his worthless calf, the mechanic his "romance" with the sobered coquette, even the girl they seemed to envy or to grudge the days of blind delight for which she was now soon to pay. A small trader of the village, who had recently filed his petition, was discussed in an atmosphere wholly lacking in sympathy; an accident to a local landowner's car was chuckled over—"Sarved 'im right, racing and tearing about the roads like he did;" and the advisability of giving "rough music" to a wife of a villager, who was popularly believed to have an affair with another wife's husband, was avidly discussed.

The room reeked with the odor of the ruinously taxed and costly but worthless stuff they were drinking—as little kin to the ale of old time as good wine to bad water—the rank, bitter smoke of the poor quality, inexorably expensive tobacco they were smoking swirled in lazy wisps about the heavy air, and as each man faintly responded to the reluctant stimulus of the ungenerous stuff he absorbed, so the conversation grew "freer" and yet more free. It had to do with women, with what they termed "politics," and with wages and high prices.

Aire listened. As yet he was no better informed on these subjects than the rest, but nevertheless he was able to see that the attitude of mind in which every man approached the problems of these matters was one of suspicion, hatred, cunning, selfishness, meanness and baseness. They brought to their problems nothing but these brakes and anchors and, he felt, a monumental ignorance.

Yet all these men could read. They worked long hours, but they could find a little time to acquire some knowledge of the things they discussed. They had time to clean their minds—as well as their bodies. But many of them did neither, nor desired to. They were not content with the nature of their environment, but neither were they prepared to make any personal effort or sacrifice to raise themselves from it. Rather it seemed that their dull desire was to pull down to their level those above it, and for this they appeared to rely mainly upon chance or a vague, imperfectly understood weapon (to be wielded by others) called The Strike. Here and there in the village a man of different character would slowly drag himself from the morass; but no sincere congratulation ever passed from his erstwhile fellows to him, and they regarded him only with dull envy, malice and dislike.

It seemed to Aire that they were little better than apes, trained in childhood at the free schools with a machine-made training that was speedily forgotten and willingly abandoned. He was—he had been—one of them himself. Only it had never occurred to him before, either to seek a way out of the morass, or that he must primarily help himself out.

He opened his mouth to speak, to tell them of the great discovery. But he did not speak. What was the good? They knew it already. He remembered that he had been lower, even nearer the ape than most of these, all of whom had been taught to read and to write.

He said "Good night" and left the room, and his "mates" fell for a moment to discussing with gloomy relish what they conceived to be a change for the worse in him.

But he was away for home, his mind occupied in marshaling the knowledge that he had gleaned from Bryce that evening.

HIS wife had supper ready for him, roughly laid out on a clothless table. She was still wearing the clothes in which she had worked through the day, and, he thought, her hair had not been touched since the morning.

She was faintly surprised at his absolute sobriety, and during the meal her eyes wandered repeatedly to the clothes he was wearing, the suit of cheap, ready-made black which he wore sometimes on Sunday.

"You look as if you'd been to a funeral or something to-night," she said. "Ain't used to seeing you dressed up. How did you get on with Bryce?"

"I learned a lot," he said. "A lot. There's a lot in them books of his."

"Yes, and a lot of it's no good to anybody that I can see," she said.

He did not answer. When next he spoke it was to ask her to put on the kettle, all the kettles she had.

"Whatever for?"

"I'm going to bathe properly and be clean now and always. I'm going to wash off the—the—grime of the Hen and Chickens."

He hesitated a moment. Then his eyes gleamed and his jaw hardened.

"And you'd better burn them filthy clothes I used to wear in the gravel-pit. I'm never going to wear them again. I'm going up—and up— Yes." He stared at the woman in the dim and shadowy light. She looked drab and old and shrinking, though her eyes were wide with wonder.

"We—you, too—have got to make a change. You, too, mind. I can do it. Something has been lit up in my head like a white light, a strong light, and I can see new things—new sense in things. I'm going to drive myself—*drive.*"

His head was raised and his lean face was dark and implacable. His huge hands gripped tightly the wooden arms of his chair, his nostrils were dilated and a deep frown cut a vertical black line between his brows. It looked like a streak of black paint below the white bandage.

And the look in his eyes had become remote, almost expressionless, like the changeless, unwavering stare of a great preying bird.

A thin flame burst out of a bit of wood in the dwindled fire and soared.

"I'm going up!" he said, his eyes on the flame. "Like that!"

The flame went out.

The woman stared stupidly.

"You, too," he reminded her. "You've got to fight—to keep up. No more slip-slopping about anyhow. We've got to look after ourselves: our minds and our clothes and our bodies. I been thinking. Dirty, untidy clothes when they needn't be, helps to make dirty, untidy bodies. Yes, and dirty, untidy minds, too. I've thought of that to-night."

There was pride in his voice, for he had discovered that for himself, and he knew it to be true.

"D'ye understand, Annie?"

She hesitated, afraid to handle this manifestation of what she feared was a form of madness as she would have liked to handle it.

"Yes, I s'pose so. I know what you mean, if it can be done."

He smiled and leaned back, murmuring things from the book with which Bryce had coached him, while his wife filled the kettles.

She did it sulkily, though why she could not have told. But there was that within her, very strong, which warned her against the impending effort.

Aire, lost in his recapitulation of things learned that night, sat like a man whispering in his sleep, staring blankly before him.

Under his bandage the wound throbbed steadily without pain, a heavy, regular beat, as if it might have been a mechanical device supplying the energy for that light which had been lit in his brain.

TO BRYCE the schoolmaster, to the doctor, and most of all to Eleanor Malton the month that followed was a month of amazement.

Aire leaped forward and up. What Eleanor and Bryce had planned to be a steady educating became less an educating than a pouring of knowledge into the new and incredibly capacious mind of the gravel-digger. He consumed that which Bryce had to offer like fire consuming dry bracken. He forgot nothing. His bewildering power of memory astonished Bryce. The schoolmaster said so one evening when he called at the Manor to ransack Eleanor's library for further material for his amazing pupil.

Eleanor had guests, a cousin, Graham Keyle and his sister, with whom she was going to the continent on the following day. They listened, astonished, to Bryce.

"It's the man's memory which startles one, Miss Malton," said the old schoolmaster, throwing out his hands. "He remembers without any effort—everything. He never forgets, you understand. Even minute things. Yet he seems instinctively to marshal, in the order of their importance, the things he remembers." The old schoolmaster stared at them over an armful of translated classics. "Last week he read Gibbon's 'Decline and Fall' in five days. I am convinced that every word of that monumental thing is packed away in that extraordinary mind of his, never to be forgotten."

"But is that quite worth while?" objected Keyle, who was young and intensely modern. "There's a good deal of lumber in Gibbon, and isn't he often inexact?"

The old schoolmaster stared.

"Does it matter to the Atlantic whether it holds a few gallons more than it need, Mr. Keyle?" he returned. "Aire is colossal——"

"As the Atlantic is colossal," laughed Keyle. "I see."

"But he is. And he is more than an insatiable collector and retainer of knowledge. He has a wonderful instinct for what is real and what is worthless. I think he is heir to a remarkable future."

"Mr. Bryce is right, Graham," said Eleanor. "Aire impresses one. It's impossible to avoid seeing that a great future is inevitable for him."

"Unless that tiny area of bone pressure upon the brain is removed or removes itself! A matter of one-hundredth of an inch, perhaps," Keyle reminded them. He was very much in love with Eleanor, and in the mood to detect far-off danger, or even to imagine it.

Eleanor understood.

"In the meantime I think we ought to give him every chance, don't you?" she said. "I don't think you remember him, Graham, as he was, or you, too, would be amazed at his really wonderful transformation. It would be wicked not to help him, I think."

She turned to Bryce.

"What are you choosing for him this time?" she asked, and they fell to selecting books.

It amused Graham Keyle to choose the most difficult and heaviest of a rather heavy library, built up years before by Eleanor's father.

But Bryce took all he had to give without demur.

"It makes no difference to Aire. The more difficult the subject the better he likes it, provided it is worth while."

All that the schoolmaster had said was true. Aire was wonderful. But his gigantic improvement had not confined itself to the more serious forms of knowledge.

Eleanor, through Bryce, had lent him—he would not accept a gift—a hundred pounds, and this he had halved with his wife.

His own fifty pounds he had spent wisely—largely upon clothing and personal things. Instinctively he had bought correctly, modeling himself largely upon the well-groomed doctor. Also, although he still occupied the same cottage, he had developed a passion for cleanliness, for personal neatness. He was never seen unshaven now, and he looked like a man who cared for himself even to the point of fastidiousness.

The change was marvelous. It dawned upon even the slow-witted villagers that Aire was a handsome man, pronouncedly handsome. They might have forgiven him this, and in time even have condoned his appearance of being well-dressed and clean. But he was never seen at the beer-house now, and when he talked with any of them he used words which many of them did not understand. They could not see that these words were the result of his newly acquired knowledge, nor could they understand that he used them, not to show his superiority, but because they were the right, the exact, words necessary to convey his meaning. He was expressing his thoughts in correct language and so debased, so limited and careless were his erstwhile mates in their mode of speech that he might almost as well have spoken in some foreign tongue as in correct English.

For this they envied him with the envy that becomes hatred.

But with his wife there was no change. Daily he increased the wide gap between them. She could not keep up with him, and very quickly ceased to make an effort.

She had thrown away her share of the money upon the most outrageous finery, cheap, gaudy stuff from the cash drapers, so that his mouth went awry when one Sunday he first saw her dressed to go out. She saw that and a sullenness darkened her face. For days past a strange and increasing mildness had characterized him, and she no longer feared him as in the old days of brutishness.

"Well, don't you like it?" she asked shrilly.

"I don't think you have made the best of your chance, Annie," he said. "But we'll puzzle it out together. There's—isn't there too much color?" His eyes were on her flamboyant hat.

"Like me to dress in black always, I s'pose?" she snapped.

"Why, no; but—somehow— Look here, Annie, let's ask Miss Malton's advice when she comes home. She's been very kind——"

"Miss Malton!" she half screamed. "It's all Miss Malton with you now. It'll be 'Eleanor' next—Nell—that's it, Nell."

His heavy frown checked her.

"Don't be a fool, woman," he said, and said no more. There was a curious glowing in his eyes as he turned, went indoors and took a book.

"You ain't coming for a walk, then?" she cried.

"Not to-night."

She hesitated, another gibe on her lips, feared to utter it and flounced away. She was proud of her finery and determined to show it.

Indoors Aire grimly applied himself to his reading.

Already he realized that his wife would fail, was bound to fail to keep pace with him. He had accepted it. He believed that she would make no difficulty when she, too, realized it. By that time he would have money and he believed that it was only a question of money. She had long ceased to love him and he to love her, if indeed they had ever loved at all. That had been ground out of their lives in the gravel-digging days.

So he sat, noting with the mind that never forgot the endless parade of knowledge that passed before his eyes like a swift stream. Presently, lying wakeful in the darkness, he would review, as it were, all which he had that day garnered. He would lie for hours thus.

An incident which occurred some days after the little scene with his wife spurred him to yet fiercer effort.

He had returned early from a walk with Noyes—a clever and scholarly man who had been interested in Bryce's account of the amazing change and had come to talk with Aire.

His wife had not been in the kitchen and he assumed that she was out. He had gone into the bedroom to brush his hair and had come upon her there, crying.

"Why, what is the matter, Annie?" he asked.

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"Oh, I dunno," she answered. "You was only changed into a toff by accident. It's a bit of bone pressing on your brain that makes you so—clever. You're a toff now, and you look like a toff, I'll own, and as far as I know you knows as much, and perhaps more, than the toffs. But it's only a mite of pressure that done it for you." She laughed mirthlessly.

"You don't like me in my new clothes, well—and I don't like you in yours. It ain't a natural thing. I ain't good enough for you now and you're too good for me."

She laughed harshly, and he realized that she had been drinking.

"You've had what Bryce and that lot call a stroke of luck, and you've left me in the lurch," she cried. "Old Bryce is telling everybody that a miracle has been worked on you. But no miracle hasn't been worked on me and, for all you care, I can stay down in the mud and you can climb out of it. It's true, that is, and you know it," she continued wildly. "You despise me now—despise me——"

He stopped her, one heavy hand on each of her shoulders.

"You have been listening to the venom of envious people, Annie," he said. "All I achieve I shall share with you. I know that in the dreadful days when I was in the slough you were a good wife to me; a good mate. Come, now, what am I to do? What do you want me to do—to be? I will do all that I can. I ask you, invite you, I entreat you to come with me on the new road as far as you can. If you fail, who am I to blame you? I shall not blame you. And I will always serve you, share with you all I can. But to say such things as you have said to-night is to try to pull me down; to drag me back. You are my wife. You owe me your support because you are my wife. You speak of miracles, but this change is not a miracle. It is only a variation of a situation that is old as history—the situation in which God has seen fit to endow a husband with gifts which hitherto He has withheld from the wife. I can tell you that there are two issues to such a situation, a happy and an unhappy issue. History is full of examples. But it rests as much with the wife as with the husband, and the solution is easy. They need only trust each other and be kind to each other. It is as simple as that——"

But she was coarse in grain, born to, doomed to, only fit for the slough from which he was tearing himself.

She interrupted him almost ferociously.

"Haven't you got the sense to see I can't understand half what you're chatting about?" she shouted miserably. "You—you make me feel like a kind of silly animal with your talk. I wish you'd shut up. What good's all this chat? You've got out of my class and I s'pose I can go to the devil for all you care."

She gazed at him, flushed and furious from the strange and fatal jealousy which had fed upon her soul from almost the first day of the change. He was upon a plane to which her limitations rendered it impossible for her to ascend.

Yet he offered, from his increasing altitude, both hands willingly to raise her. But there was that in the very manner of his offering, and through no fault of his own, which only made wider the gap between them.

He looked at her, his eyes full of sympathy.

"At least, try to think well of me," he said at last, slowly. "It's no fault of mine——"

"Oh, who said it was? But you needn't show off every time you open your mouth about it!" she flung at him wretchedly and went down to the kitchen.

FOR no clearly defined reason Eleanor Malton cut short her trip with the Keyles. She left them in Paris weeks before she originally intended and came home.

But long before she reached Malton she knew why she was content, even eager, to abandon the leisurely traveling in congenial company and hasten home.

As one who has left behind a rare plant may become conscious suddenly of an imperative desire to return and see how it is thriving, so Eleanor was conscious of a desire to see how her strange protegé, Aire, was progressing.

She knew from Bryce's letter that his mental and intellectual development continued, and the old schoolmaster had not neglected to comment on the almost equally astonishing improvement in his personal appearance.

"I believe it is as much curiosity about Aire's appearance which is sending me home as interest in his development," she told herself as she gazed from the window of the railway carriage.

"There were always possibilities about him even in the yellow days of the gravel," she mused. "He was always big and shapely, and his face was good as far as any face that is soulless could be. I shall be interested to see him."

And on the afternoon of the following day she saw him.

It was in the pine wood through which she had been accustomed to walk to the gravel-pit that, on her way to his cottage, she met him. He was sitting on the soft ground cushioned many feet deep with pine-needles, leaning against the bole of a big fir, reading.

He was not aware of her moving over the soft floor of the wood until she was within a yard of him. Then he looked up with a start, and rose. Through the dense lattice-work overhead a ray of sunlight struck down so truly and exactly, centering upon him, that it seemed like a ray of light focused upon him of set purpose.

In that yellow ray, standing out against the somber, checkered shadows of the warm and silent wood, she saw that the hall-marks of the laborer had been eradicated magically from him. There was nothing about this lean-faced, quietly dressed, hatless man, save only his height, which recalled the harsh figure of the yellow-stained wielder of the heavy iron tools of the gravel-pit.

Eleanor Malton stared for a moment, speechless with surprise.

She had often seen him hatless, but never had she known his dark and slightly curling hair to be other than a dusty and wild tangle—uncared for. But this man's head was clean and handsome. His face was thinner, and it seemed to have become oddly refined. And the gray level eyes that once had always been inflamed from the gritty dust, from lack of sleep, or from the excess of stimulant which he consumed nightly, were now as clear and wide open as those of a child. His dark-gray clothes and his boots, though not of an expensive quality, were made with some pretension to fit.

And these outward things, combined in their little way with the force of the gigantic mental improvement within, had so changed the man that it was as though Aire of the gravel-pit had died and that a totally different Aire of the pine wood had risen phenix-like from his grave.

The shock was ousted by a keener shock that came piercingly like a white-hot arrow to illumine the mind of the woman with a great and inevitable dawn.

She stared at him, her eyes open, with an air of breathlessness.

She loved him!

It had come to her with a sharpness so fierce and unexpected that she was near to crying out at the poignancy of it. Her heart began to beat with a violence that almost frightened her, and she saw in his eyes the dawn of a comprehension, of a passion, born of gratitude, that rocked her soul.

"Ah, Miss Eleanor!" he said unsteadily. "Eleanor—Eleanor." He moved toward her.

She put out her hands—to hold him off, she thought confusedly but without conviction—and they met about his neck as he stooped, enfolding her in what seemed hazily to her a huge and vastly deep, almost cavernous, embrace.

Both were trembling.

At once, it seemed to her, she was free again; whether he had released her, whether she had torn free, she never knew.

"But," she stammered, "I—didn't know—I didn't suspect. I must have loved you from the beginning—even when you were swinging the great irons!"

She stood clear, closing her eyes to think the better, leaning against a fir trunk.

Her mind went racing back to the tawny gravel-pits, to that strange and terrible odor of smashed flint and perspiration.

Had she loved that huge, yellow figure of brute force, that primitive, powerful semi-savage? Desperately she recalled the scene she had so often sketched, and so tensely strung were all her nerves of the body and the brain that she seemed again to be standing in the reddish-yellow waste place, shimmering and quivering in the glow of the sun, studying him as a naturalist may study a strange animal. The great brown throat, the iron-hard knotted arms, the reddened eyes, all this she must have loved, but so wide had been the social gap dividing them that it had never occurred to her that love could be possible between them.

She shivered.

But now that stained and towering symbol of brute force was dead, thank God, dead or forever vanished.

She opened her eyes with a long, deep, wholly unconscious sigh, and for the first time a touch of passion lightened her face.

Her breath caught as she remembered the wife.

"But what are we to do?" she cried.

Even as she spoke she saw coming into view, from behind the trees, Aire's wife, walking slowly along the winding path toward them.

He turned, following her glance.

"We must talk, Aire," she said, using his surname as of old. "Come to the house this evening," and left him.

She was still trembling, she found, when five minutes later she stepped from the pine wood into her own park. And she was cold, she thought. But the blood was leaping in her veins like flame.

THERE was, she remembered, a concert of some kind taking place in the village that evening, so that, dining early, she was able to let the servants off and await Aire alone.

She was glad, even grateful for the small coincidence which would assure them privacy for their discussion of the disaster—or was it a triumph? or a tragedy? She felt that it might be anything, tragedy, comedy or farce. For it was wild—wild.

It came to her that she could do nothing better than to leave the village now, at once, hurry, flee back to Paris and the comparatively sane, conventional life with the Keyles.

She stood up, staring through the windows at the coming twilight. The weather had changed, and a slow autumn drizzle was falling.

In the pine wood there had been the broken gold of the sun rays falling through the interstices of the tree-tops, gold and warmth, and all the throat-catching, luring charm of solitude and secrecy. But now the hour was gray, the hue of the twilight was gray, too, and cold, and there was a sense of hopelessness and a hint of terror in the evening.

She drew the soft thick curtains impatiently and turned again to the brightness of the luxurious room.

She sat staring restlessly into the fire, which she had ordered to be lighted with the coming of the chill rain.

"Why should I be attracted by him—love him?" she asked herself. "It is not the new Aire that calls to me, for I have never really seen him before. But if it is the Aire of old I love, why should I never suspect it until that Aire has disappeared? Oh, it is a mystery—a mystery."

She tried again.

"It is not his new talents—gifts—which attract me, for these are no more than pure accident?

"Is it the memory of the great, rough-hewn, barbarous strength of him? No, not that. I have never adored physique as some women do. I should find it easier to fear it." She frowned, casting about in her mind for means of escape from this strange, mysterious and almost sinister thraldom of love. Means of escape, or was it means of excuse? She did not know; and, weary of thought, she felt that soon she would not care. Other aspects of the thing crowded before her mind.

"But what are we going to *do?*"

It was the old cry—as old as the hour when man and woman first realized that they possessed power to distinguish what is good from that which is not good.

The idea of some secret, sordid liaison with the ex-gravel-digger, haunted by the specter of his prying and impossible wife, was intolerable.

Divorce—of a kind? No doubt Annie Aire could be readily bought off—that was only a question of price. Eleanor Malton shuddered at the pit to which her train of thought had led her.

That was too impossible. So, one purchased an animal from a poor but unwilling seller.

Then what remained? She had accepted at last the knowledge that she loved Aire, and she knew that the new Aire worshiped her. She had seen that in those few seconds in the pine wood.

Renunciation! But the word was a javelin through her heart. She had come to the age of twenty-five unscathed of love, and though she had met many men, never till now had she encountered one who could release the passion which lay intent within the soul of this superb woman. Many had tried, for her beauty was striking and she was rich. All had failed—all save Aire—

her own laborer—no, not even that, but some strange, compelling and fantastic stranger built upon the débris of the banished slave of the gravel.

Renunciation!

"Oh, not yet!" she cried softly. "Not yet! . . . But I must."

She stood up sharply.

"But I will not. Perhaps, even, I can not. Does any one? Renunciation is out of date—unnecessary." The bell rang gently as her mind, her emotions, swung to and fro.

Her heart leaped again. She glanced at the mirror, and was amazed at her own glowing beauty. She had half feared that she would see a face that was old and ugly; haggard; wrung and ravaged with doubt and a resentful despair.

Slowly she went to the great door and let him in.

"You have come," she said breathlessly, and led the way.

Renunciation!

The word thinned and vanished from her mind.

He was extraordinarily agitated, far more so than she. That she recognized at once. But his eyes drank her in.

"I came to say—it was my intention to express my great gratitude," he stammered. "You have opened the gates to a new world . . . the lessons with Bryce have shown me so much . . . possibilities. Things to do that have been waiting to be done for centuries. Only now you—I—it is all enmeshed with this feeling—this great wave—of—," he faltered.

She threw the world to the winds.

"Of love," she finished. "Our secret."

Like a man who moves against his will, powerless to defy an influence stronger than himself, he raised his arms, and she sank in them—deep, deep, fathoms deep.

Instantly, it seemed to her, across that blind silence came stabbing a harsh and acrid voice, malignant, bitter, with a species of malevolent triumph.

"Just what I thought!"

It was the voice of Aire's wife.

Quite slowly they parted and turned, facing the woman in the doorway.

"I s'pose you both thought I should be satisfied to sit quiet at the concert," she shouted, her face inflamed with rage and hate. "While you—the lady and the laborer—sneaked off here——"

Aire shivered, shot a glance at the frozen figure at his side, and strode across to his wife.

"Be silent—now," he said. "There is only one to blame—me!"

She ran into the room, stopping before Eleanor Malton.

"And what about you—who tempted him—bribed him—bought him—" she screamed, half beside herself.

"Be silent, I say." Aire reached for the wild fist which she was shaking at Eleanor. Rapt in her rage, she mistook his movement. Thinking he meant to strike her, she struck back wildly.

Her hard-knuckled fist drove sharply against the temple of the stooping man. There was no real force behind it, and, directed against one of such physique as Aire, it looked puny.

But to the terror and sheer amazement of both Eleanor and his wife, he cried out sharply and fell unconscious.

The two women stared at each other for a moment, horror in their eyes.

Then simultaneously they dropped to their knees beside the still form of the man. But at once their greatest terror was nullified, for Aire was moving.

"He's not dead," said Eleanor. She lifted her head and listened.

"Be quiet," she cried to Mrs. Aire, whose sobbings and whimpering endearments to the semiconscious man were rising to the note of hysteria.

Eleanor was listening to the low hum of a motor-car which had stopped outside.

The bell rang, and with an effort she went out.

It was Doctor Baynton.

"You, Doctor? There is nobody I would sooner see," she said on a high note.

The old doctor looked at her keenly.

"I saw your housekeeper going into the concert, and she told me that you were not feeling well and were not coming. I thought I would look in, Eleanor." He watched the flow of color as it came back to her face.

"Nothing much wrong, my dear. You look splendid. A false alarm, eh?"

She forced herself to steadiness.

"Nothing the matter with me, Doctor," she said with a set composure. "But there may be a task for you. The Aires are here and something is wrong with Aire. There has been an accident, and he is ill."

"Accident! What sort of accident? Where is he?"

"They had a misunderstanding, and his wife struck at him. Oh, only with her fist—no harder than a child could strike. But he collapsed completely."

Together they went into the room.

His wife had helped Aire to a sitting position, and he was struggling to rise. He was very pale, and his eyes were oddly glazed.

"Sit still," said the doctor, and examined him, the women watching. They hardly breathed.

But save for a faint reddening of the old scar, long healed, there was nothing, and the doctor glancing from one to the other seemed puzzled.

He helped Aire to stand.

"How d'you feel now?"

Aire answered drowsily that he was tired and wanted to sleep. He was pale, and he swayed like a wornout man where he stood.

"Shock! He has been overdoing it," said the doctor, and added that he would give him a lift home in his car.

"You will be all right in the morning," he said, and breezily shepherded them out to the car.

Eleanor, standing in the hall, looking through drizzle that was like a falling network of gold thread in the light, saw Aire's white face sink back in the gloom of the interior of the car, and it came to her with a pang that so the white face of a man drowning in dark waters at night might look to one at the moment of sinking. She had not spoken to Aire, nor he to her, since the coming of the doctor.

The engine of the car, under the urge of the self-starter, woke to life with a rushing energy.

"Good night!" called the doctor.

"Good night," replied Eleanor. But she felt in her deep heart that it should have been "good-by," at least to Aire.

The red tail-light swam away, diminishing down the drive until it vanished, then wearily she closed the door and returned to the lighted room.

She stood for a moment on the threshold, staring in, her mind busy with the events of the past half-hour. It seemed to her that she had lived more in that half-hour than in all the rest of her life. In those few moments she had known almost every emotion of which she was capable—the soft, warm blooming of love, the enervation of surrender, the keen and biting flame of passion instantly and unexpectedly checked, cut down as with a sword, the unendurable shame of the reproaches of the wife, biting like acid into her pride, upsetting, wrecking into a fearful chaos all her lifelong instincts of courtesy given and received; deadly terror, when for a second or so she believed him dead; despair, pity, regret, hope, and yet again the shame of lying so desperately to the doctor.

Yes—all the emotions. And at the end of it, what? Nothing—nothing save the contempt and hatred of a woman she could only despise! Not a word from the man for whom she had lived that racking half-hour; only a glimpse of his white face sinking back into the gloom like the face of a drowning man.

And now—what came next? To-morrow? Was this the end? Was she facing a blank wall? She did not know, could not guess. And now she could not think. She was tired, worn out, as though she had not rested for many days, many nights.

She switched off the lights, went to the dining-room, drank the glass of wine she needed and passed heavy-eyed up-stairs to sleep, to dream.

ELEANOR woke late, to a day of sunshine so glorious, a sky so blue, and a little wind from the east so invigorating that her courage rose. With it there waxed and grew also a hunger, an urgency to know what must happen now.

She must see Aire—and his wife—at once, and reach some understanding. It was impossible to allow things to remain at the mercy of such a woman as Mrs. Aire. For, wronged in thought though not in deed, as the woman had been, nevertheless she could not be permitted to make matters worse than they were. Eleanor went chill as she pictured the sly gossip, the sidelong glances that must result if Mrs. Aire, her jealous rage no longer checked by fear, deliberately gossiped to injure the lady of the manor.

She must be checked.

Then, too, there was Aire himself—his work, his genius, his great future. Was all this to be hampered, shackled and encumbered by the malevolence of a wife whom he no longer loved, and who, despite her envious jealousy, no longer loved him, but only sought to hold him back to the level in which she was at home?

"Whatever may happen, whatever the whole world may say, I will continue to help him with my love," she was saying with a nervous inflexibility as she walked toward the Aires' cottage.

While yet some distance away she saw Mrs. Aire at the doorway, and she went steadily to her, and a reception that was amazing.

"Good morning, miss," said Mrs. Aire, with all the old, accustomed deference. Indeed it seemed that there was more of deference than ever before, something approaching servility.

But there was a singular light of triumph in the woman's eyes.

"I expect you have come to inquire about Aire, miss?" continued Mrs. Aire quietly, and there was a touch of triumph in her voice as well as her eyes.

Eleanor said nothing, watching her.

Then it burst out.

"Well, miss, he's cured! He's better! He must have been in a kind of fever last night, and for weeks before that. But," she flung it at the girl like an open knife, "he's cured, and in his right mind again! He's come back to his senses again—and back to me! Look, miss!"

She stepped aside and threw out her hand toward a box on the kitchen floor. It was a rough deal box, filled with a jumble of books and papers.

The voice of Aire's wife came to the girl like a voice driving through fog.

"Look, miss! He can't read; he can't write; and he'll have no more need for these fine clothes and boots, 'cepting on a Sunday. He's cured; and he's forgot all the rubbish he learned when he was bad!" Eleanor let the insult embedded in the savage sentences pass. She was staring at the folded clothes by the box, the gray suit in which he had looked so well; at the books and papers, the stepping-stones of genius; and she could not bring herself to believe the woman.

"You mean—you mean to say——"

Mrs. Aire faced her to deliver what she clearly regarded as the *coup de grâce*.

"I mean to say, miss, that he's what he was born to be again—your foreman gravel-digger, not your—" she hesitated, then spat it out, for such was her nature—"your gravel-digger, not your fancy man! Yes, the doctor's been, and he says that the bone pressure has been removed, owing to me hitting him last night in the same place, the doctor says. And Bryce has seen him, too, and talked to him; and Bryce says he's forgot all he was taught, and that he's no more than what he was at first, and never will be. He had his chance and threw it away for a woman—for you. Like thousands of others."

She glared.

"But he suits me better like he is!" adding, with the significant stare of the blackmailer, " 'specially if his wages was to be raised a little!"

"Where is he?" asked Eleanor.

"Where, miss? Why, up at the gravel-pit, to be sure."

She half-turned, then, either moved by the look in the girl's eyes or, more probably, anxious not to offend too unforgivably, added:

"And I'm not the only one who ought to be glad, miss. Don't forget that! What good was a man like him to you? You'd have ruined your life over him!"

Eleanor turned away.

For a moment she hesitated. Then she took the path to the pits.

It was very hot there, for the eastern pine woods curtained back the breeze from the sunken yellow waste.

She heard, as she came up, the clash of iron and the grinding of heavy shovels from the pit, and as she rounded a high heap of waste gravel, she saw him.

He was balancing upon a red terrace of the gravel, packed almost as hard as solid stone, driving the bar deep into a hole for leverage enough to pry off a mass of the stuff for the man to shovel away below. He was intent on the work, and swung the bar vertically with a savage energy. She watched him in silence.

He was dressed as of old in the stained and shapeless corduroy and huge heavy boots. His arms were bare—they looked oddly white—and his head and chest were bare. His face was streaked and stained with reddish dust and moisture, and his hair was no longer smooth.

She heard him call to the man below.

"We'll get this load off, George, an' then draw off down to th' Hen for a drop o' beer!"

The hot, bitter odor of smashed flint stung her nostrils.

She had wondered only yesterday whether it was this man she had loved. Now she knew.

"How could I have asked myself that?" she said softly, her glance traveling round the glaring red-and-yellow wildness to return to the toiler on the terrace. "I shall never come here again. The place—and the man—are dreadful. No more . . . it must have been that other Aire whom I felt for—loved. Some phantom. And he is gone—forever."

But, strangely, it was without sorrow, without regret for that vanished personality that she took money from her purse and moved forward for the last proof.

"Good morning, men!" she called.

"Mornin', miss!" Aire touched his streaming forehead convulsively.

They stared at each other.

She saw that the eyes were indeed the eyes of the old Aire, dull, unintelligent, and without a sign of recollection.

"It is very hot," she said.

"Yes, miss." An expectancy which she knew of old crept into his eyes.

She dropped a half-crown into the big palm—a chill touched her veins as she saw the new blisters there.

"You would like something to drink, I expect, on such a day as this," she said.

"Thank 'ee, Miss Eleanor." He grinned pocketed the money, picked up the iron bar and began once more to drive it into the gravel with heavy, jarring and effective strokes.

For a moment Eleanor wondered oddly if the dull concussion of the iron upon the clayey flint would seem to beat upon her heart forever, but as she drew farther and farther away from the pit the thudding died out and at last came no more.

To Sylvia, Forever Still

By *Miriam Crittenden Carman*

DARLING, the spring has brought again remembrance,
Nor falling leaf, nor cool winds of the fall
Can bring despair so swiftly, half so poignant
As the first robin's call.

You who were born the fairy child of laughter,
Whose slender feet went dancing down the day,
Dearly divined, a ghost through April twilight,
Steal from your hidden way;

Come for a little hour of forgetting
Out of your silence, for the gardens bloom
Fragrant, memorious. You do not heed them
In your pale tomb.

Crocus and hyacinth, and through the twilight
The early lantern of the daffodil,
These can not call or hurt you who are safely
Dead, and forever still.

Follow a Faithful Father Through the Shadows While He Proves That Power of a Great Love in a Simple Heart

McCann's Danny

By John A. Moroso

Illustrations by J. Henry

THE bounty paid him by the State was one hundred and fifty dollars a head. He "put them through the wires," that is, he pushed the ebony-handled lever that jerked the soul from the body of a man condemned to death!

When he took this job as executioner, the swiftness of the stroke by the electric current did not feaze him. His medical family history, heart disease, the history of a plain and humble family, had equipped him for what some call the dread moment, and others call the glad moment of release.

He came to think that to die quickly, as his people before him had died, was a kindly consideration by Providence of what qualities he might have gathered in life. But that was after he had loved and his woman had died. After she went away, death meant nothing to him. He was just the sort of man needed in the so-called mills of the gods over which Justice is the boss. He would make a good executioner. The Law said that people had to be killed occasionally. It had low-class humanity to pick from, McCann's class, for a killer.

The jury couldn't be expected to do it; the eloquent district attorney, who cried to high Heaven for justice, beseeching the twelve men to order the death of the prisoner at the bar, he, certainly, a member of the Democratic Club and all that, couldn't be expected to shoot the juice into the man harnessed in the little yellow oak chair. The judge, generally a fat sort of person who had trimmed his sails to many a political gale and catspaw, was required by law to lean over his desk and tell the convicted man that he was to have his soul and body torn asunder between certain hours; but if the law had filled its mission and had said: "Thou art my servant. Thou condemnest. God, when He orders life and death, either breathes life into the clay or blasteth it Himself. Thou art the one who is taking His place in the affairs of His little ones. Kill!" there would not be many candidates for judges in criminal courts.

And so the law had to fish around for some one to do this thing, and the agreement was that he should be paid one hundred and fifty dollars every time he snuffed out a life, young or old, putting an end pitilessly to what might have been in the unevoked cortices of the condemned man's brain, his untilled field of soul, the part God may have touched too lightly, his dreams of love, of kindness.

JAMES McCANN had loved but once. She was a bit of an Irish lass with jet-black hair, teeth of whiteness, one dimple, wide sweet lips and a bosom that hungered with maternity. Her name was Nora. Their banns were read at low mass by the priest. They were married. They thewed and fallowed and their get was a weazened little bit of humanity. It could suckle and that was all. Nora knew that her time was near and she asked her Jimmie, then a great hulking, lovable brute, to look after that baby boy of hers. She faded into the dusk of the room and her soul passed through the door which was unopened and went to the street where many children were at play and where she tried to touch their lovely heads but could not touch them. She, being dead, was denied that caress of life.

His, her boy's, name, was Danny, after her father. Her man had promised her to be his safeguard. He was not a strong man, just a plain laboring man who loved her mightily. But she had given her life for this child and he was to conserve it, not as a memento to her and her great love for him, her husband, but as an offering to Almighty God, Who had made her for that singular purpose.

He promised her that the boy would have his care. He swore to her that every ugly word he had said when he was drunk, as he came home of a Saturday night, was but a love message disguised by the corner saloon. It was the hooch that made him talk that way. It was nothing but the invention of man, worse than any invention of the devil, that made him forget that her eyes were timid violets and her breasts little mounds of snow, as pure as the white temples of Mary, the Mother of God. He didn't want her hand to get that cold in his rough paws. He didn't want her to leave him in this dirty muck of a world. He wanted her to whistle back at him as he came up the dark tenement stairs. Her white arms in the gloom of the fourth floor, her white arms outreaching, he wanted them there; and the smell of the boiling cabbage and the laughter hanging in the dull air of the little flat. He wanted her love, and God had put down His wand claiming her and killing her and taking her away from him and the little weazened mite pounding at her chilling bosom.

She lay there dead, and some women pulled a sheet up to her chin. Her toes stuck up under it at the further end. The timidity had fled her violet eyes. The smile was gone from her broad lips that had been moist and crimson with love. Danny bawled in the kitchen, a neighbor woman lending him her breasts. McCann knelt beside the dead clay that life had given him. He had no intelligence. He had no philosophy, no recourse in such stress. He had been taught and had taken the teaching that his union with this woman who lay fallen under the sickle, this wilted and dead flower that had seeded and had succumbed, was a Sacrament. The priest had said so. The priest was a holy man; he could not lie. McCann buried his wife and never again looked upon a woman with a glint in his eye. His heart within him curled like a leaf in August. It was dead.

He had promised her about the boy. Her timid eyes came to him at times in the middle of the night and pleaded for the runt of a lad. McCann didn't end in the brass-railed gutter of the speak-easy. He kept away from the place, anathematizing it and spitting at it when he passed. He was a sober and sullen man and thus became a fearsome man in his block and finally in his precinct. His assembly district leader saw McCann's qualities and utilized them. His hair was white and his eyebrows jet black. His jaw was heavy; his neck was thick and fed with live veins that stood out with heavily pumping blood. He was a good captain of the election precinct and everybody there voted his party's ticket. Nobody loved him. Everybody feared him. His shoulders were terrible in their weight. His arms were knotted with muscles, his legs pillars of strength, his frown was a cloud blacker than the fury of a Kilkenny man with a grievance.

His boy Danny grew up to be afraid of him, afraid of him and no one else on God's earth. He was slender and as thin of chest as a wasp. He coughed a great deal and the cigarettes didn't help him. Nor did the occasional drink. But the coke seemed to brighten him some. His eyes would glisten and he would strut after a sniff of the stuff from the back of his wrist.

He became a thief, and when the cops got too hot after him he changed base and name and wandered the world, forgetting his father. His mother, whose soul had passed through the unopened tenement door to the street, and whose hand had tried in vain to touch the heads of the children, his mother, whose eyes were moist young violets and whose breasts were little mounds of snow as pure as Mary's temples caressed by the brown hair that the baby hands of Christ had played with, watched over him.

The runt thieved in many places and came back to New York, where it seemed necessary in his line of business to bump off a fellow human. He was out of luck that night. The gun was still smoking when a hand caught his wrist and twisted it. A bull had him.

The tread of Time brought its reckoning for Danny McCann and its reward for Jimmy, his dad. The boy got twenty years for croaking the fellow crook he had believed a stool pigeon; and his father, for faithful service in herding the sheep to the polls, was put on the pay-roll of the state. No one was asking for that particular job. There were fearful whispers along the dark political alleys and corridors about its entailed hardships, such as inability to sleep after a double execution, tales faintly told of drugging the condemned just before they were taken to the little green door of the bare room of death and one oft-repeated story of a legally killed man who opened his eyes as he lay on the wheeled slab in the autopsy room.

This last story had been embellished, and it still goes the rounds of the prisons of the world where the current is used. It is not all fancy, for hidden away in the countless law books is a decision that upon a time, not so long ago, a man had been killed by the law, had been declared legally dead; but after the warden, witnesses and prison surgeon had solemnly signed the document that the condemned had been duly executed, the heart suddenly began to beat again. It was a strong heart and kept its stride. But the rote of the law had been followed. The man was dead so far as the statutes were concerned, and yet the coming of spring was among his possessions, the laughter of children on the street and the faint music of life, the break in the voice of a sorrowful woman, the cheerful cacophony of a slammed door, the kettle-drums of the symphony, when the rain patters on the roof and the shutters; in the midsummer the heavy bass from the heavens as the clouds collided; the little song of the grasses at dawn as the dew uplifted and went back to its hiding-place with the souls of the departed; the privilege of standing in a dark entrance and watching his own people pass under a street light, seeing them sadly or smilingly go their way, he being legally dead and rid of all responsibility.

BETTER and more capable men in the herding of the sheep in Jimmy McCann's assembly district had been offered this job, but had refused it. Jimmy took it because his boy was "up there." It was an easy job and lucrative and he had become accustomed to it after killing a score of men, when Danny dug his way out of the place and resumed cigarettes, dope and hooch.

McCann grew old. Killing people for the twelve men, the eloquent district attorney and the porpoise-like judge became commonplace. The Latin mumbling of the priest to a thoroughly doped human being meant nothing to him. It was all a part of the formula of living and dying. He threw in the control and the current tore the body and the soul apart. He was as much a prisoner as any of the criminals, for although he was free to come and go there was no one in the outside world calling to him. He saved every penny of his blood money, not that he expected any good to come from it, but because there was nothing in life that he desired to buy with it except perhaps a pouch of fine-cut tobacco occasionally. Sometimes his love for her who was dead surged through his heart in the stillness of the night in the City of Silent Men and she would repeat to him in her soft sweet voice her petition that he look after her boy. At such times he would consider throwing up his job and going out into the world and searching for Danny. But he had come to know the ways of criminals and was convinced that Danny would soon be coming back to the prison, and so he stayed on, waiting patiently.

Danny returned but the warden did not inform him of it. He merely looked at him queerly one morning and asked him whether he didn't want a vacation. McCann did not. The warden almost insisted on his going away for a month, declaring that he wanted to break in another executioner so that in case of illness there would be no delay for the law. McCann was stubborn. He returned to the death chamber where he had been engaged in cleaning the contacts of a coagulation of dust and moisture, making the instrument of death ready.

The click of a door in the corridor adjoining informed McCann of the arrival of a new capital case in the row of the condemned. He finished his task and looked in, curious to know whether the newcomer was young or old. He had found it hard to kill boys in the twenties.

"Hello, Dad!" came from the cell farthest from the little green door. Across the barred windows there fell a gentle rain in a brick court upon which opened the morgue room adjoining the chamber of execution. A flock of brown sparrows noisily informed the little group of prisoners waiting their turns to be "put through" that it was spring. McCann, thinking that his imagination had played him a trick went to the newly occupied cell and looked in. It was Danny.

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph," he whispered. That was why the warden wanted to get rid of him for a month.

He hurried back to the death chamber without a word to his son, fell into one of the chairs provided for the execution witnesses and rubbed his black eyebrows with trembling hands, his brain stunned for the time. All morning he sat in the gray light of the little room of death undisturbed, near his son, trying to think out what he should do. At noon when it was time for him to show up at the mess-table he had decided on one thing: he would not leave the job to another man. There would then be no slightest chance for Danny. But as long as he was there there was a possibility, a possibility! Sure there was. A possibility of cheating the law. There was no plan formulating in his head at the time. He had thirty days ahead of him. He had to do something. He could hear his dead wife telling him that. Perhaps she would suggest a way, yes she would point the way.

It was two days, two precious days, before he got his emotions in such control that he dared visit the boy and talk with him. On their first meeting within the prison the lad had shown complete indifference, his mind being busy with the problem of getting out of the place. He was just a product of the crowded side-street ends of New York, motherless, the gutters his playground, his kindergarten that of the gunman, learning to snatch a baseball from under speeding motor trucks, learning to land the first blow in a fight, learning the foul language of outcasts, gambling skilfully before he was ten, a familiar of young trollops at fifteen; Randall's Island for his first punishment, a vile hole where he took a post-graduate course with many congenital criminals sent up for "reformation" after trying every crime—rapine, theft, murder, arson. The law of his kind was the earliest form of law, primitive, entirely personal.

"Hello, Dad." There was no great tone of defiance in his voice as he pulled himself from his pallet and answered the call of his father.

"Danny, how are you feeling?" There was a tremor in the old man's question and his big hand on the bars of the door shook.

"Pretty good, Dad." He had one quality. He was no coward.

"Where'd you go after you escaped?"

"With the old bunch."

"On the road, Danny?"

"No. With the Twenty-Seventh."

"To the war?"

"Sure. With O'Ryan."

For a moment he forgot about the job before him, a little glow of pride warming his heart and shining in his eyes. He had never felt pride in him before and now it had come when it was too late. Still it was precious. Only one other thing had come in his life to make a thrill of pleasure, the love for his woman. He was silent a long time as he warmed himself with the thought that Danny had been out of the gutter for a while anyhow, that he had done something other than steal and gamble and snuff dope.

"You got your discharge papers?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Got anything else from the army, Danny?"

"What d'yuh mean anything else? I got nothing but a hole in the top of me head covered with silver and me legs is held together with silver threads from the knees down."

"You were wounded?"

"You said it."

"You didn't get no medals, Danny?"

"Sure. They're in hock at Sol's Place on Ninth Avener."

"And the papers with 'em?"

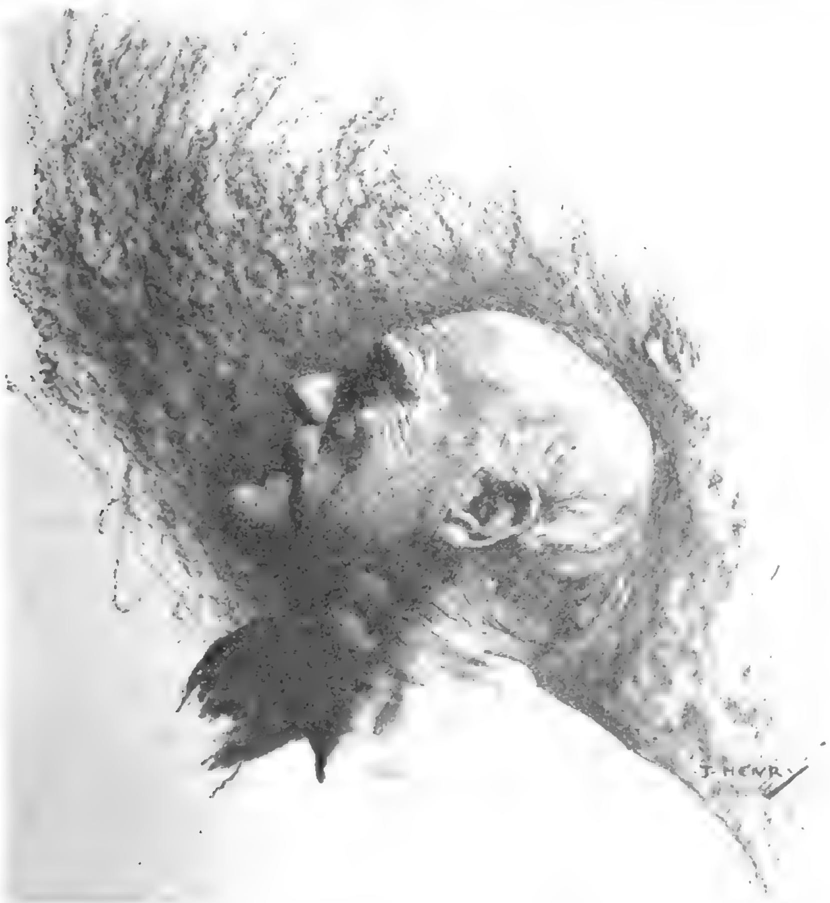
"Maggie Regan's got 'em, old Pat Regan's Maggie, the truckman on Eleventh Avener."

"Danny?"

"Yes."

"I got to save you. I got to save you somehow," he whispered.

The boy slunk back into the shadows of the cell and dropped to the cot as his father trudged back to the death chamber. "Swell chance," he muttered. "Swell chance." But as he lay with closed eyes, listening to the happy gossip of the brown sparrows in the courtyard, through which the dead guests of the adjoining chamber were taken to the lime pits, a shudder passed through his well-patched frame and he did not want to die.



He had promised her about the boy. Her timid eyes came to him at times in the middle of the night and pleaded for the runt of a lad

McCann's first plan was to ground the current. It could be done and Danny could, at the sound of a cough, strain forward in the heavy harness of the chair and fall back, just as the condemned always do when the juice is thrown on. Again for the second voltage and only a little bit forward for the third.

But there would be the post-mortem. The two physicians provided by the law would have to cut into him. He might bribe one of them, but the other was beyond the reach of money. He would try him with a father's appeal. No. There was too much risk in that. This surgeon was too scrupulous a man. If he thought there was a plan on to cheat the law, he would report it to the warden and another executioner would take his place.

His second plan was to bribe the guards of the death cells. There was, then, a recurrence of influenza in the prison and he might manage to put in Danny's cell one of the newly dead, sending Danny out in a coffin and, in the pretense that too much dope had been used on his boy, lift the dead body to the chair, strap it in quickly and send the current through it. Among the convicts was a surgeon, doing a term for manslaughter as the result of illegal practice. He was generally called on to do the ugly work in the autopsies and was easily accessible. He did not know that McCann was to kill his own boy. The question was put to him hypothetically.

"The only drawback in that plan," advised the convict, "would be that the surgeons holding the post-mortem would know that the current had been applied to a dead body. Electricity does not somatically kill."

"What's that mean?"

"The tissues are not dead. The soul, if there is such a thing, is bounced out of the body, hurled out; but the shock of the current only stops the mechanism. It would be possible to apply the current again and restore the reflexes, which mean corporeal life. In the post-mortems we find that the heart of the so-called executed man is systole, which means that it is contracted and ready to expel the blood and resume circulation. The right degree of intermittent currents would get it working again and the man would be alive."

"Could you do it?" A great hope had come to McCann.

"Hell, no, man. The post-mortem would finish the fellow. But if they didn't cut into him it could be done. In Boston, as far back as 1910 or earlier, rats were electrocuted in the same way as we electrocute people here and then brought back to life by the same current."

McCann rubbed his black eyebrows hopelessly and returned to cleaning and polishing the switchboard in the little cut-off of the death chamber, just back of the yellow chair and its idle harness. Three weeks of the precious four had passed in this hopeless groping. During that time if he slept at all he was not cognizant of it, for he passed from the terrible problem before him into memories of his Nora which may have been dreams, the boy and his mother were so firmly linked together now toward the end.

It was at the beginning of this last week that he found himself sitting up in bed one night clutching at the only beautiful vision that had come to him in life. They had been together, Nora and himself, in the little kitchen of their flat, and on the table were Danny's medals and citations for bravery. Danny lay in the adjoining bedroom and the light of the kitchen lamp shone on his head where glistened a silver plate, set in by the army surgeons after what the boy had described as a "ruckus." As in dreams, sometimes, his eyes had also pierced cloth and flesh, and the wounds where the machine-gun fire had smashed his legs were visible. The bones had been drilled and knitted together with silver thread. Nora was so happy. He would never again be a bad boy. Here were the papers which sung high praises of him, whereas in other times the cops and the neighbors had promised the electric-chair for that Danny McCann.

He may have been dreaming or may have reached that magic moment between dreaming and waking when one sees with open eyes the things of the other world. But Nora left him with her red lips smiling and moist and her timid violet eyes filled with happiness. He ate a little breakfast that morning, visited Danny, which he did not have the right to do as a father, but which he could easily manage to do at any time because of his long friendship with the guards in the cell corridor beyond the green door, talked with him cheerfully for the first time and then asked the warden for a day off.

The sunshine of the brilliant spring morning blinded him, but its warmth somehow seemed to reach a corner of his heart. He even paused outside the great iron gate to stare for a moment at the beds of pink geraniums on either side. Then he took a train to New York and found his old neighborhood and the stable of Pat Regan, the truckman. Pat immediately hurried to his flat and had his wife rummage in Maggie's possessions and find for him the citations. From there he went to the pawn-shop where he got his boy's medals. These treasures he took back with him to prison. The feel of them in his inside coat pocket brought him a mild sense of elation. They had made Nora happy. The warden, when he asked for Danny's discharge from the army, again demanded to know whether he was going to step aside from his task temporarily. He shook his head. Another man, a less skilful executioner, might burn his boy. The sponges of the electrodes at the top of the skull and on the calf of the right leg might not be moistened enough. It happened sometimes.

"He's a Spartan or a fool," muttered the warden as McCann left the office. "We'd better watch him. Maybe he intends to take a jolt of that stuff himself and go along with the boy."

Efforts for a new trial had failed with a decision of the highest court. Danny's lawyer had put in the formal petition for a commutation to life imprisonment. It was somewhere in the governor's office, to be read over at the last moment and quickly decided. There was nothing else to be done apparently. McCann had spent his savings freely in the legal efforts. In his little room lay copies of the decision upholding the sentence of death and the final petition for clemency. To them he added the citations, the medals and the boy's discharge from the Twenty-Seventh. A pitiful little display. It might have been eloquent enough just after the war, but not now, more than two years after all the glitter and thrill of Fifth Avenue parades, triumphal arches and hero-worship had worn thin.

Suddenly there came to his mind a thought so terrible that he sprang from his chair with a cry. This thing could not be done, by himself or by any other man with a drop of blood in his veins. He would go to the governor himself and explain why it couldn't be allowed. He would go to the capitol and, if he was not admitted to the chief executive's office, he would go to his mansion and force his way in. If he was thrown out, he would leave in the governor's home his plea and these exhibits, now so worn and soiled. His determination to carry out this line of action steadied his nerves. He hurried to the storekeeper and bought a lot of foolscap paper, a pen, a bottle of ink and a blotting-pad and returned to his room to make out his case. He was illiterate and it took him all day and part of the night to prepare his document. Early the following morning he took a train for the State capital.

McCANN wasn't thrown out. He was an employee of the state and his political affiliations were all right. A secretary told him to wait. He waited patiently all day. The hour for closing came. He had outwaited every other petitioner. The electric lights were on. The anteroom of the executive's chamber was empty save for the old man with silver hair and black eyebrows, holding a bundle of papers in his two huge, bony hands.

The secretary had not forgotten him. There was no chance of that happening, for every time he had looked into the room McCann was sitting there facing him, never changing feature or posture of limb. At last the secretary motioned to him and he rose and entered the room. It was empty of people. The staff had gone home. At the other end was a large open door. He passed through it. A man in middle age lifted a tired face from a mass of documents. McCann laid his papers before him.

"Sit down, please." The secretary pulled a chair forward for McCann.

The medals made a noise as they fell from the little bundle of documents to the flat-top desk. The governor picked them up, glanced at them and laid them aside with a touch of reverence.

The citations were quickly read and then with a sigh he began to puzzle out the chirography and the ill-spelling of the petition before him. He had expected to finish with this patient and humble political toiler in about twenty minutes.

The great building was silent and dark save for the lights in the governor's chamber, a single light to guide him in the hall and those at the entrance. The minutes crept into a half hour and then into an hour before the governor put aside the papers with a gasp.

"You say that death by the electric-chair would be cruel and unusual punishment in this case," he began. "That would be, of course, against the Constitution, but that question was fought out when the state first adopted electrocution and it was decided that capital punishment by the chair would not be cruel and unusual."

"Decided by judges who didn't have to throw on the switch," said McCann when the governor waited for him to offer something in his own behalf. "They wouldn't know as much about it as the public executioner. I'm that. The warden wanted me to step aside so I wouldn't have to kill my own lad, but I was afraid to. Another man might burn him to death. I promised his dead mother I'd take care of him. I gotta keep that promise if it breaks my heart in two pieces." Not a tear in his eyes. Not a quaver in his throat. The governor's face was white and the petition of James McCann shook in his hands.

"Well, what do you know about the unusual cruelty of this electrocution that the judges of the higher courts could not or did not foresee?"

"There's metal where the electrodes fit on the top of the head and the calf of the leg. Shrapnel tore a piece of his skull off and there's a silver plate there now. His legs was cut up by machine-gun fire and both of them are wired together. The current wouldn't all get to him inside. It might short circuit on him, burn off his skin and not kill him."

"Was he wounded that badly in the service?"

"He was all but killed, but he never complained and didn't ask no pension. There's his medals and papers for what he gave his country. He ain't got but less than half a body to pay back for what he done against the law anyhow." His voice broke suddenly. He rubbed his eyebrows with the back of a hand and added in a half whisper: "I got a whole body. If you could take that it would be fairer." He had not eaten that day and but little from day to day for three weeks. Sleep had seldom refreshed him. He sat as if dazed as the governor whispered to his secretary, who quickly filled in a printed form and laid it before the executive for his signature. He did not see what was going on, or if he did see he did not understand. His mind was back more than a score of years and he was plodding up the dark hallway from the street. From the fourth-floor landing white arms were outreaching and a voice called. Soon her red lips would press against his and in the light of the kitchen lamp he would gaze down in deep but dumb love into the violet depths of her eyes, knowing her secret and sharing in its possession. His head fell on one side against the tall back of the chair. His eyes were closed.

"Here's the commutation of your boy's sentence from death to life," the governor said slowly. It is possible that McCann heard this. "I'll let my secretary take it back with you to the prison. No wonder he was brave in battle."

The secretary went to McCann to stir him from his sleep; but his Nora had seen that his task was finished and her white arms had reached him at last.

The hate of some men is as implacable as the cobra which is the theme—certainly a striking one—of

"After Twenty Years" By C. G. Milham

Mr. Milham is a new writer—one of the strong younger type—that EVERYBODY'S takes a pride in introducing. His first story in

September EVERYBODY'S *Out August 15*

Would You Have the Courage to Carry Out McCalman's Desperate Plan to Insure the Welfare of a Loved One?

Double Indemnity*

By Elmer Davis

Illustration by Henry Fisk

THE after-dinner oratory was interminable; and Roger Dilling, watching his heavy black cigar turn to a heap of ashes in his coffee cup, wondered why men ever let themselves be enticed to public banquets. He looked up and around him and was lost in fresh wonder at the vacuity of the average human face; not one in ten wore the healthy look of boredom that decency required. The thin man with the Adam's apple, at the table by the door, was the only one whose face bore evidence of the splendid contempt that Dilling felt for the whole affair, and Dilling looked at him more carefully, with a growing sense of sympathy that suddenly exploded into recognition. Why, it was McCalman, of course! The great McCalman, they had called him at the State University ten years ago. Dilling no longer had much confidence in the undergraduate judgment, but McCalman had evidently become, if not great, at least a person of superior discernment; for he shared Dilling's opinion of this pompous solemnity.

He couldn't catch McCalman's eye, but when the last speaker had ended his discourse Dilling was waiting at the door. He hadn't seen McCalman since that commencement day, when Dilling, thankful to have graduated at all, took his undistinguished diploma and stood aside while McCalman accepted a degree *summa cum laude*, and half a dozen prizes with it. For McCalman was the bright light of their class; and when he and Crystal Morey walked in cap and gown to her sorority house, after the commencement, the whole class had followed to see them married. Curious that Dilling had heard so little of them since; he hadn't even known they were in New York. And though he and McCalman had never been particularly close in college, they seemed to be the only members of their class in a large city a long way from home. It would be good to meet again.

McCalman, stumbling into him at the door, greeted him eagerly enough, though with a certain apologetic manner that Dilling was slow to interpret. "Why, Roger! What luck! I didn't know you were in the East. What are you doing?"

"Not very much."

McCalman looked at him keenly, and Dilling, confident that his evening clothes were perfect and that his plump pink face and well-manicured pink nails were advertisements of prosperity, endured the stare with a complacency of which he was instantly ashamed. For McCalman, apparently, hadn't prospered. His face was lined and his hair was graying; his threadbare dinner coat was of so antique a cut that it seemed plausibly a relic of college days; and one of the folds of his wing collar was cracked. Ten years ago he had dressed with a good deal of care, and Dilling conjectured that if he wore a cracked collar now it was only because he lacked the money to buy a new one.

"I'm not altogether a do-nothing," Dilling apologized, "but I'm lucky enough to be

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freed from the need of working for a living."

"You came into some money when you graduated, didn't you?"

"A little. When the war came, I put it into textiles. I had the good luck to know when to climb aboard and, what was more important, when to get off. One of my old partners was to speak to-night; I came to hear him, and he caught cold and stayed at home. There's my alibi; I hope yours is as good."

"I'm representing my chief," said McCalman. "He evidently knew what this would be like. Perhaps you didn't know—I'm in the Museum; department of ethnology."

"I suppose you're a devil of a savant," Dilling conjectured, "with a whole string of books and two or three honorary degrees."

"Only my Ph. D.," McCalman admitted. "Oh, I'll get them; but they're a little slow. Books—yes; I've published two or three. They're technical. You wouldn't have heard of them; nobody has but my professional rivals. I'm working on a textbook now that ought to be of a little more practical value."

"How's Crystal?"

"Fine. We were talking about you just the other night, wondering what had become of you. You must come out and have dinner with us, if you don't mind voyaging thirty-five minutes into Jersey. Of course thirty-five minutes means it takes an hour to get there, but you have to do it when you have children."

"Congratulations," said Dilling. "How many?"

"Boy and girl. They're great kids, Roger; you'll like them. A good deal of a strain on Crystal, of course; but we'll be out of the woods some day. Then she can have a maid, and I can have—a new dress suit, among other things."

His laugh was so plainly an indication that his shabbiness was to be considered as a mere temporary inconvenience that Dilling felt obliged to laugh, too. After all, it was unthinkable that the great McCalman should be permanently and irrevocably poor. Crystal, too, had been a rather expensive person, as Dilling remembered the years when he and some others had competed for her favor before McCalman swept them all out of the way. Poverty for her must be something of a catastrophe.

"I gather you're not married," said McCalman.

"Not yet. Thirty-three isn't too late."

"Nor too early. It's a great life, Roger. Can you come out and see us Sunday? It's a little easier than other days for Crystal."

That meant, Dilling supposed when he thought it over later, that on Sundays McCalman could look after the children while Crystal got the dinner. Curious. He remembered her high spirits, restlessness, recklessness as people counted recklessness in those easy-going days; she hadn't seemed made for drudgery.

But McCalman had said she was a wonderful manager and a wonderful cook.

"I suppose," Dilling mused, "that those who really enjoy drudgery are comparatively few. Some are born to it and some have it thrust upon them. But we never thought McCalman's wife would have to do her own work. Still, she's a good sport. I hope she thinks it's worth it."

CRYSTAL was waiting in the doorway when McCalman brought him up from the station on Sunday, with a stubby, honest-faced boy and a pretty little girl clinging to her. It was a picture that made Dilling suddenly ashamed of his comfortable and lonesome apartment.

"Hello, Roger! So glad we've found each other at last. This is Josephine and this is Billy. Billy's nine and Josephine's eight; and we like them."

Billy was nine and Josephine was eight, and they had been married ten years. Dilling could read the whole history of a typical family of the intellectual proletariat in this matter of simple arithmetic. And closer inspection showed that the charming domestic picture could have endured a little retouching. The house was good enough, and the furniture had been, once; frayed rugs and ragged upholstery, scratches on the floor and nicks in the wainscoting, showed that this house was being lived in hard, with no time or money available to repair depreciation. The array of books seemed quite formidable to Dilling, but McCalman evidently felt obliged to apologize for its inadequacy.

"I borrow books of late years," he explained. "You can't borrow meat and shoes."

Crystal was thin as her husband was thin, with the thinness not of underfeeding but of overwork; and there were lines in her throat and about her eyes. Dilling knew enough about women to feel confident that six months of rest and luxury and freedom from worry would make her a rather dazzling beauty, and her frock had evidently been a good one when it was new. But it was something of a shock to compare the reality with the recollection, and he was more at ease when she excused herself and disappeared into the kitchen.

"It's pretty hard on her," McCalman apologized when she was out of hearing. "I suppose if I'd known what I was letting her in for I'd never have asked her to marry me. But it's worth it. And as soon as I can get this text-book adopted in two or three states our troubles will be over. We're carrying a pretty heavy load on this house, and I've taken out more life insurance than I can conveniently carry. But I had to do it to protect her and the children. Don't you like them? I'd like to have half a dozen. I will, too, as soon as we're on our feet."

The children, in fact, were well mannered, as Crystal's children would be; but Dilling was relieved when they preferred to play outside. He didn't feel at ease with children. And there was something in the atmosphere of this house that got on his nerves. It wasn't easy to define it, but there was a sort of tendency to explosiveness. Not a magnificent, catastrophic explosion that might blow everything to pieces, but a series of petty flares as electric sparks from an overcharged atmosphere fell on ready material. McCalman was abominably nervous; every loud noise made him start, and the cries of the children outside evidently rasped him like discords in an orchestra. Crystal was nervous, too, as Dilling discovered when he had a chance to talk to her at dinner, though with her it took the form of a static sullenness that flamed up only when the children showed reluctance to go up-stairs and out of the way when the meal was over. Even the children were fidgety; everybody's nerves seemed constantly to be carrying a capacity load, and a single mishap anywhere overbalanced them all.

Things were quieter after dinner, when the unwashed dishes were stacked in the sink and the three of them sat before the log fire while Dilling smoked a heavy cigar and McCalman fussed with his pipe. Even so, they had hardly begun the inevitable reminiscences when there was the noise of scuffling up-stairs.

"Children!" Crystal called sharply. "Go to bed!"

There was a moment of silence, then another burst of laughter and the sound of a whacking pillow.

"Billy! Stop that. Billy! Oh, good Heavens, Carl, go up and make them behave. I can't take them on now."

McCalman stamped irritably up the stairs while Dilling continued to puff his cigar, pretending to ignore this infelicitous episode. Crystal was silent for a moment, then——

"Carl didn't make it quite clear to me what you're doing."

Dilling felt that apology was required.

"In the sense of business, I'm not doing anything in particular, except a little by-play in the market. Don't think I'm only an idler, Crystal; my hobby is the history of old New York. Probably that doesn't sound like much, but it's quite a field for antiquaries, and it amuses me. But I'm not obliged to make money any more. I had a little luck, and I—well, I suppose I retired. You probably think that's outrageous, retiring at thirty-three; but——"

"Outrageous?" said Crystal. "I think it's heavenly. I'm only thirty-one, but I should like to retire."

Dilling waved a genial cigar toward the upper regions, where the tumult had sunk into a muttering babble.

"I suppose it keeps you pretty busy, but you wouldn't want to retire from Carl and the children."

"No," Crystal admitted, in the tone of one reciting the answers to a catechism, "I wouldn't want to retire from Carl and the children."

"You're delightfully situated here," Dilling continued, cursing himself for a fatuous fool as he did it, "and Carl tells me that he expects great things from his text-book."

"Of course," said Crystal. "Ever since we were married he's been expecting great things from something. Ten years is a long time, but in ten years more we can settle back into senility and start expecting great things from the children. It's rotten of me to talk like that. Carl works awfully hard, and I know he's clever. But he happened to pick the wrong business. Nobody ever got rich out of ethnology. You probably think it's abominable to want money. You don't need to want it. You've got it. And you know that if we all went back to the class reunion the fact that Carl had done a wonderful work classifying data on clan relationships among the Indians wouldn't offset the fact that his clothes were worn shiny and mine were two years out of style."

"Well," said Dilling comfortably, "a little change of scene would cheer you up. I suppose you don't come into town very often, but I'd like to have you and Carl see my apartment. Come in to dinner and the theatre, if there's anybody you could leave with the children."

"I'd love it," said Crystal simply. "We haven't been to the theatre in five years. Even when we can afford it, Carl always has some outside work to do on one of his books, or the children aren't well, or something happens. When do you want us?"

"Whenever you can come."

"There's a nurse who looks after the children of all our town," said Crystal, "if one can get on her date book. I'll have Carl call her up. I think it would take two or three years off my shoulders just to leave them on somebody's hands for an evening. They're nice, but they're enough. And I can still make myself look well enough to do you credit, at any rate, if I have time to repair the wreckage."

"Then we'll do it," Dilling decided, "whenever the nurse has an evening to spare. We'll make Carl take a day off from his text-book."

So they had it settled when McCalman came down-stairs triumphant. He had quieted the disturbance, though at some cost to his nerves; his hands were trembling as he refilled his pipe.

"Little devils," he grunted. "But I like 'em. We'll have a houseful some day, eh, Crystal?"

DILLING was a man who wanted to do what was right, and he had some doubts as he went home that evening if it would be well to flaunt his prosperity in their faces. Common sense, however, argued that he wasn't flaunting anything in their faces; they were old friends who would naturally want to see how he lived, to whom he was under an obligation of hospitality; moreover, an evening of amusement would do them both good. They were old enough to endure the spectacle of a prosperous friend without too much envy.

And Crystal rose to the occasion. When they appeared at his apartment on the appointed evening, she looked a good seven years younger than the overworked housewife he had seen in the Jersey suburb. Dilling understood that she had rouged with remarkable skill; he surmised, moreover, that she had done still more remarkable things with her evening gown. Beyond doubt it was a respectable antiquity retouched and made over, but it looked convincing to any masculine observer. Nothing could conceal the fact that she was a little too thin, but that was not an irrevocable disaster; and for this evening she had recovered a good deal of her old-time gaiety.

Her delighted gasp at his perfectly furnished apartment was flattering enough, even though she could not simulate a plausible interest in the maps and old books that would have delighted one of the curious individuals who followed Dilling's hobby. Over his baby-grand piano she hovered long enough for him to recall the battered upright that stood in their living-room, and turned away with obvious reluctance.

"I'd like to try it, Roger; but I'm afraid you remember the way I used to play in college. You couldn't stand the shock. No, I haven't touched my own in years; but the children use it for their lessons. Good Heavens, what an apartment! And the first really respectable kitchenette I've ever seen. Do you do your own cooking?"

"I employ an invaluable Jap. He could get us up an excellent dinner, but I thought you'd rather go somewhere and dance."

"Good Lord, yes, Crystal," said McCalman. "You'd love it. You may remember, Roger, that I don't dance."

"I remember you didn't in college; but when all the new steps came in——"

"I was too busy by that time. But Crystal hasn't forgotten."

Dilling took them to the best hotel dining-room in town, which also maintained the best dancing orchestra in town; and after a course or two he took Crystal out on the floor. There was an awkward interval while they tried to get in step, but presently they found the rhythm and floated away in an easy harmony of movement that put the other dancers to shame.

"The same old Crystal," said Dilling. "Nobody ever waltzed like you. I'm surprised that you didn't make Roger learn."

"I do my dancing with a vacuum-cleaner. And Roger doesn't know what he's missing—he's always too busy."

Yet he seemed to be enjoying this evening of unaccustomed hilarity as much as Crystal—more than Crystal, Dilling surmised as they strolled out through the hotel lobby; for he conjectured that the gown which appeared so distinguished to him was, amid the expensive and jeweled toilettes around them, rather unsatisfactory to its wearer. Perhaps he had been wrong, after all. They moved in different worlds, and the mere accident of ancient association couldn't bridge the gulf. He sat in vague depression through the rippling musical comedy that so amused them, and was almost relieved when McCalman peered at his watch in the half light, ten minutes before the final curtain, and said that they'd have to leave now if they expected to catch the 11:02. Dilling loyally helped them trample on the feet of the unfortunates who sat between them and the aisle, and found a taxi for them outside. He would have taken them to their ferry, but Crystal refused.

"I won't take you a mile out of the way when you're within three blocks of your apartment. Besides, it would never do to watch Mr. and Mrs. Cinderella start home from the ball."

And as he strolled back to his apartment after watching their taxi around the corner he concluded that she was right. The accidents which had sent him into textiles and McCalman into ethnology had raised a barrier that could not be broken down by memories of the age when any endurable companion seemed a lifelong friend. They were pleasant enough, and he could easily grow to like Crystal as well as ever; but there was no use trying. Probably he wouldn't see them again.

BUT he did. Before the winter was over Dilling had fallen into the habit of spending every other Sunday at the cottage in Jersey. Two or three times he tried to reciprocate their hospitality, but Crystal put him off with explanations of the difficulty of engaging the nurse. It took no great ingenuity to surmise that the difficulty was in finding the five dollars which was the nurse's charge for an evening; nor was it hard for him to guess the real reason—perhaps they didn't fully realize it themselves—that made them so eager to renew the ancient friendship. Dilling was a living reminder of their brilliant past. Ten years ago it had been something of a privilege to be seen strolling across the campus with McCalman, and appearance at a theatre or a dance with Crystal Morey implied a triumph over half a dozen competitors. Their neighbors in Jersey knew them only as an overworked, poorly dressed and altogether undistinguished couple; but he had known them when——

Well, if he could contribute nothing more to their welfare, he could at least give them the small satisfaction of his company and his memories. And when spring came, he could do more. He brought his car out of storage, and the Sunday afternoon drive with the whole family through the Jersey hills became a fortnightly fixture. In his way, he supposed, he was doing a good deal for them; but they were doing something for him too. His Japanese boy was a good cook, but Crystal's suppers were positively Napoleonic. The children he was honestly growing to like, though he was still a little afraid of them. McCalman could have interested him, he imagined, if he had not been so desperately concentrated on the success which was always just a little way ahead; and before long it had been tacitly understood that McCalman would linger in the living-room for a single pipe after dinner and then withdraw to the upper chamber that was called the study, and used—except for the corner occupied by McCalman's desk—as a junk-room. Here he worked on the manuscript of his textbook while Dilling wiped the dishes for Crystal, and played for her on the piano that was so infernally out of tune, and talked to her, alone, until McCalman was summoned down-stairs to bid him good-by when he hurried out to catch the 10:57 back to town.

Spring was wearing on into summer before Dilling would acknowledge, even to himself, that the real attraction that drew

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him back each fortnight to the household in Jersey was those evenings with Crystal.

He had come to know her amazingly well in those talks, and silences, before the fireplace; better than he had ever known her in the university when they were only high-spirited, empty-headed children; better, he sometimes thought, than her husband knew her. For if he knew her, and appreciated her, as Dilling had come to do, no textbook would ever take him away from her. And at other times Dilling felt that he didn't know her at all. Crystal the woman he knew; he was beginning to feel that he was the only one who knew her or had ever known her; in a sense he was helping to create that woman, giving her something that her husband was too busy to give; something, Dilling liked to think, that her husband wouldn't know how to give.

But there was another Crystal—Crystal the wife and mother; the Crystal who was part of an overstrained household engaged in a desperate struggle against malignant destiny. That Crystal broke out often enough into spurts of temper directed against McCalman, against the children, against Dilling himself; for after his first two or three visits they made no effort to keep up in his presence their hard-won self-control. Dilling didn't mind her temper; but he was puzzled, and baffled as well, by the unaccountable emergence, now and then, of this Crystal whom he didn't know, and whom a man who had never been engaged in a long, desperate and apparently interminable struggle with poverty could never understand.

One evening McCalman knocked out the ashes from his after-dinner pipe as they sat in the living-room and absently reached for his watch. But the watch wasn't there.

"I forgot," he laughed nervously. "I left it at the jeweler's to be repaired."

"Repaired is good," said Crystal. Dilling, fascinated, watched McCalman's prominent Adam's apple sliding rapidly up and down.

"I don't see," McCalman presently growled, "why you have to advertise our situation."

"Oh, good Heavens, Carl! Roger has two eyes; he can see it without being told."

"Look here," said Dilling decisively, "Crystal's been frank with me and I'll be frank with you. I've got a lot of money—four or five hundred thousand. I don't spend half my income. If you're temporarily in trouble, while you're getting out this book, let me lend you a couple of thousand. I'll never miss it, and I've heard enough about the money there is in textbooks to be perfectly sure you'll have no trouble in paying it back."

"No!" they said in unison, and then stared at each other as if each was rather amazed at the other's ready support. McCalman undertook to elaborate and soften the refusal.

"You see, old man, we'll be all right after the first of the month—pay-day. It was only a life-insurance premium that temporarily put us under. I carry a good deal—too much, I suppose, considering my salary; but the house is mortgaged so heavily that the insurance is pretty nearly all that would be left for Crystal and the kids. Much obliged, but we can't do it."

"You ought to do it," said Dilling sharply. "Crystal works too hard. So do you, for that matter."

"I can stand it," McCalman asserted with a valiant smile. "I know it's hard on Crystal; but she's a good soldier."

"She shouldn't have to stand it," Dilling declared. "Won't you take a little, for three months, or six months, or whatever time you may need?" He wondered, and despised himself for wondering, if the real ground of their reluctance might not be a shrinking from putting themselves in a position of dependence on one whom they had once so far surpassed.

"No," said Crystal, smiling faintly. "Thanks, Roger, but we owe too much money already." And that smile set Dilling's heart thumping furiously, for he thought he could see in it her admission that she had her own reason for refusing.

SO PRESENTLY McCalman went up to his work, and Dilling lit a fresh cigar and settled down into lazy silence. Crystal went over to the piano, struck a chord or two, and rose sharply, her nerves set on edge by the discords of the untuned keys. She strode up and down the room, the long loose pointed sleeve of her dull green negligée—an old and tattered garment that still had a good deal of distinction—swishing beside her as she walked. In a moment she had mastered herself and sunk into the shabby brocaded armchair with the broken springs where she usually sat in the evenings; only the swinging of her slippered foot showed that the storm had not yet died down.

"You're a brave little girl," said Dilling in a voice that, to his surprise, cracked and almost died in his throat.

Crystal's fingers clenched, relaxed, clenched again.

"A good soldier, Carl called me. And enlisted for a long war, it seems. My grandfather fought in the Union army. I remember the war stories he used to tell us when we were kids. He enlisted at the first call—for three months. Everybody thought three months was a joke—they'd be in Richmond in six weeks. And he fought clear through to Appomattox. It seems to run in the family."

"But you'll have your Appomattox some day."

"Perhaps. You haven't seen one thing after another come to nothing for ten years. Carl's clever, of course—brilliant, in a way. But he doesn't seem able to do anything with it. He's obsessed with this determination to get somewhere, and we're sacrificing our lives to it, year by year. It's frightfully hard on him, of course; but sometimes I wonder if success and money really mean much to him any more; if he hasn't forgotten what to do with them; if he isn't just fighting blindly. Sometimes I feel that I am."

"I shouldn't say that he's fighting blindly. He's devoted to you and the children."

"He thinks he is. What does he know about the children? I know less than I should, because I'm always cooking or sewing or cleaning house, but he sees less of them than I do. That's one of the reasons I sometimes think it costs too much. He thinks he cares for me. He doesn't know me; I don't know myself. Sometimes I wonder if I really have any personality any more; if I'm not just part of a machine, an overloaded machine. If I have a personality, Carl doesn't know it. When he thinks of me as a person at all, he thinks of the girl he married ten years ago. Whatever I am, I'm not that.

"And what's it for? What's it for? Suppose this text-book does make money—all the money we hope for. That's supposing a good deal, but if it does— We can pay for the house, and buy a car, and be sure the children will go to good schools. And what else? We'll have forgotten just what it was all about. We won't know each other; there will be nothing left of us to know. I'd hardly know how to act if Carl spent his evenings down here instead of in the study. I've forgotten who he is, and he doesn't know who I am. But what of that? I could buy a fur coat and shift the housework to a couple of maids, and have six more children to please Carl."

After a long silence Dilling said helplessly:

"I wish I could do something."

"But you can't. Nobody could do anything but ourselves, and I'm not sure that even we could. I've wanted to, sometimes. We could take a cheap flat somewhere near the Museum; walk-up, if need be; five rooms would be enough. The children would run wild, you're going to say; but they wouldn't. I could take care of a place like that with an hour's work a day, and give the children the rest of the time. I'd be willing to answer for them. Carl could drop some of his life insurance; if anything happened to him, half what he carries would keep us going while I learned to be a really good stenographer, and if I couldn't make myself a better secretary than nine-tenths of the women in the business— But perhaps it's too late. We've gone into this thing, enlisted for the war; and I suppose it's no time to restate our war aims. We're in it, and we'll have to see it through—but what's it for?"

Dilling had nothing to say; his thoughts were a tumultuous churning confusion, and he dared not inspect his emotions. Crystal rose suddenly a moment later.

"I wish you'd go. I—I'm going to cry. And I can't do it up-stairs; I'd disturb Carl. No—please go."

Because it seemed the only thing he could do for her, Dilling went. His own hands were trembling as he lit his cigar in the smoker of the city-bound train, and his agitation mounted steadily on the way back to his apartment. As the door closed behind him, he switched on the lights and glowered at the furnishings that he had selected, piece by piece, with loving care. The furniture, the rugs, the pictures, the lamps—extraordinary how hard it was to find lamps that were not an offense to the eye, but he had found them. The price of any one of them would give Crystal a week of rest at Atlantic City. The price of his little Bokhara rug would dress her richly for a year. "What's it for?" he demanded helplessly. "What's it for?"

HE WAS walking up the Avenue the next afternoon, reflecting that some of the merits of a perfect June day are reserved for the private edification of New York City. The town was blooming as only New York could bloom in the short interval between raw winter and stifling heat. It was a wonderful day, and Dilling responded to it, if somewhat late.

He had spent three hours at the auction of a famous collection, waiting for his chance at a single item—Van Diercks's map of Nieuw Amsterdam in 1652. The bidding was brisk, but Dilling raised regularly in his turn until all the others had dropped out but McNair, the dealer. Dilling bid thirty-three hundred; McNair made it thirty-five. Dilling raised his offer by a hundred; McNair went a hundred higher; Dilling bid thirty-eight hundred.

"Four thousand," said McNair. And Dilling, hesitating, finally let him have it.

As he walked up the Avenue he came to the conclusion that this had been a pusillanimous act. He was getting too cautious—too fat and contented. Contented! He was tremendously discontented, but he was doing nothing to better himself. Two years ago he had sold out his textile holdings and determined to make himself perfectly secure for the rest of his life. Despite the temptations of a wildly distorted security market, he had invested with extreme care; he had preferred seven per cent. with complete safety to nine per cent. with the barest shade of doubt. And what was it for? Last year he had saved ten thousand dollars above his liberal personal expenditures and his income tax. He was fattening, softening, disintegrating. He did nothing but follow this absurd antiquarian hobby, and he could not even do that with courage and tenacity. He had let another man have something which he wanted badly because he was afraid to pay the price—and no ruinous price at that.

McNair's shop was only a block ahead. Dilling turned into it and hunted out the dealer, whom he had known for years as antagonist or collaborator at auction sales.

"I've changed my mind," said Dilling abruptly. "I'll give you five thousand for that map."

"If I'd bought it for myself," said McNair, "you could have it. But I was acting as an agent."

"Then tell your principal I'll give him five thousand."

"I might as well tell you that he won't sell."

"Won't he?" said Dilling. "I suppose it's out of order, but I wish you'd tell me who he is. Maybe I could persuade him, if you can't."

"Since it's you," McNair conceded, "I'll tell you. But you won't persuade him. I bought it for the Dutch Minister, and it went to Washington by special messenger an hour ago. I understand he wants to give it to the Amsterdam Historical Society."

"My chance doesn't look very bright," Dilling admitted. "But I'll try him, anyhow. I want that map."

He strolled out into the Avenue, with an obscure feeling that his life had come to a turning-point. He had had enough of playing safe, of slowly letting himself subside into well-fed apathy. Hereafter he intended to get what he wanted, even if the opposition seemed insurmountable. At the steps of his club he paused a moment, then went briskly in and to a telephone booth, where he called his Japanese boy and ordered him to pack a bag for a trip to Washington.

Then back to a lounging-chair in the window. For a few moments he watched the passers-by; women in limousines, women walking; beautiful women, a few of them; smart women, most of them; richly dressed women, at this hour nearly all. And he hated these women with their insolent fat faces, their over-jeweled fingers, their smug certainty that because men were pleased to buy soft and costly fabrics to clothe their corpulent bodies they had been raised above their humbler sisters, designated as the salt of the earth. Not one of them was fit to wipe the dishes that Crystal washed—Crystal with her patched bungalow apron over the tattered green negligée Coming up the Avenue he had passed window after window decked with expensive gowns, coats, hats, undergarments. He would like to buy the contents of every window on the Avenue and give it all to Crystal.

He was recalled to a more practical state of mind by the reflection that even ten thousand dollars wouldn't go very far in those windows. He was a fool. But he wanted to see Crystal. And perhaps he could see her—with her husband, of course. Crystal must see this day in town. She might get the nurse to stay with the children while she came in, and McCalman joined them somewhere for dinner.

Dilling called her on the telephone, found it necessary to explain with some repetition a scheme so out of keeping with Crystal's routine, and then felt his heart jump into his mouth as she said:

"Oh, Roger! I'd love it. But Carl isn't in town. The Museum sent him to Washington this morning on business."

"Well?" said Dilling. "I don't want to see Carl; I want to see you. Get hold of this nurse. Come in for dinner, if you will, and I'll drive you back in the car. If you don't want to do that, come in for tea and I'll send you home with the commuters."

"I'll do that," she said. "Look for me on the 3:40."

FROM the long dim cavern of the ferry-house a stream of travelers poured out into the sunlight where Dilling waited beside his taxi; travelers in desperate haste, who flitted past him and away on their own quests in tower-topped Manhattan. And this, he thought, was life; they come, they pass, each preoccupied, intent on his own supremely important errand of no consequence to his neighbor; and he, Roger Dilling, standing aside and looking idly on. Then, out of the hastening throng, the one face he had been waiting for, blotting the others out of his vision. Crystal came to him eagerly, smiling; and her thin calloused hands were quivering as his plump hands closed around them.

"I take it you got the nurse," he said as he helped her into the taxi.

"I didn't; but I managed to get the children invited to supper next door. I had to operate on a fictitious aunt to do even that, and I'll have to catch the seven-ten back. But wasn't it luck? And I'd just finished some terribly needed repairs on this suit, too."

Dilling would never have known it. Her tan sports suit, and the tan straw hat that nestled around her brown hair like a helmet, seemed to him the most beautiful clothing he had ever seen.

"That's a pretty suit," he said.

"It's a miracle of impudence. If you were a woman, you'd appreciate the courage it took to make it over instead of throwing it into the rag-bag."

"Well, let's forget our troubles," he counseled. And they did forget them—forgot them at tea at the Claremont, where the long glassed-in veranda restaurant was almost empty, so that they had the table of their choice, set off in a corner behind a screen of palms, where they could look down on the long marching column of motors on Riverside Drive, and the gray glassy river, dimmed by a gray veil of haze. Beyond that, faint through the mist, the cliffs of Jersey.

"To think," said Crystal an hour or so later, waving a hand toward the distant Palisades, "that I live over there behind those hills. It doesn't seem possible. I ought to live on this island, where I can sit behind a teacup and watch the traffic go past. You think that's childish, don't you?"

Dilling regarded her, rather somberly, from behind his big cigar. She had been gayer this afternoon than he had ever seen her. He knew her well enough to divine behind that gaiety a terrible weariness, and to see in her vivacity a reaction of overstrained nerves that didn't dare settle down and find out how tired they were. He couldn't stand it.

"It's too much, Crystal," he said sharply.

"Oh, it isn't so bad just now. Carl's away; that makes it easier—for him, too."

"But he'll come back. It hurts me, Crystal, to see you killing yourself, when I'd like to give you—everything. Oh, you know it; you must have seen it."

"Yes," said Crystal softly, catching her breath. "I've seen it."

"I—I want to take you away. It isn't right. You're throwing your youth away. And you're getting nothing out of it; you don't care for him any more. I'd like to give you rest, and luxury, and all the beautiful clothes in the world. I'd like to pamper you. You need it. And I like your children; I'd love to make things smooth for them.

"That's all put wrong-end first, I suppose; but it happens that that side of it is what I think of when I see you so tired. There's more to it than that. I want you—worse than I'll ever want anything else in the world. I'm going to tell you about that, too, some time; but not now. I won't tell you that behind Carl's back. But you know it's there, and we might as well come out in the open and look it over. We can't go on any longer this way."

"I suppose not," she said dully. "Of course, to me this was only one more strain added to something that was already nearly unendurable. I've thought for years it couldn't go on much longer, but it always has. Six months ago, if anybody had asked me what I wanted, I'd have said I only wanted to rest. Just to go away from everybody—except people who would wait on me; to forget all about personalities and emotions, and sleep, sleep, sleep, eighteen hours a day. Things like that don't happen, of course. Not till you die. And I can't afford to die while the children are little."

"I could give you rest," said Dilling. "I'd be willing to keep out of your way, if I could do that. Forget me and the other personalities, if you want to."

"But I couldn't, Roger. I used to think that if anything happened to Carl—or if we got too much for each other and broke apart—that I was through. No second tries—once was enough. But you've changed that."

"Crystal!"

She met his eyes bravely.

"I wouldn't take everything and give nothing," she said. "And I couldn't, even if I wanted to. But I don't know whether I can take anything. You see, there are two Crystals. One of them works with Carl, and the other one talks before the fireplace, and lives, with you. You've made that Crystal, Roger; she belongs to you. But I don't know which one of them is the stronger."

"But if Carl's only a habit— The children would come with you, of course."

"But, Roger, I can't quit. Carl called me a good soldier, and I've enlisted for the war. For better or worse. I don't believe in marriage as a sacrament, or anything like that. But when you've said 'for better or worse' and it turns out worse through nobody's fault especially, you can't very well chuck it. It isn't done."

"That isn't the point. You're with Carl when you ought to be with me."

"But it is the point, this quitting under fire; quitting something hard for something easy. If Carl had as much money as you I'd go away with you this afternoon——"

Dilling thought he was only knocking his cigar ash into a teacup. As a matter of fact, he knocked the cup and saucer on the floor; but neither of them noticed, and a waiter who heard the crash peered around the palms, saw Dilling scowling at his cigar, and Crystal's hands twisting restlessly, and tiptoed away.

"But I can't desert the colors. I've enlisted for the war, and I can't—make a separate peace."

"It isn't your war," said Dilling. "You've said that you could live comfortably if Carl hadn't got this mad obsession to get ahead. What's it for? He's let you in for it, and he's forgotten, himself, just why you're both pounding the treadmill. As a matter of brutal fact, he'd get along better without you. He'd miss you, of course; but that would be chiefly habit. He'd have nobody to swear at. But before long he wouldn't be swearing. He could live comfortably, alone, on his salary. He'd rest. Knowing Carl, I wouldn't say that he would look the thing over, six months from now, and say it was the luckiest thing that ever happened to him; he'd think it was his duty to be outraged and to keep on missing you. But that would be largely imagination. He could work twelve hours a day and sleep the other twelve, instead of working nine, sleeping five, and worrying ten as he does now. If you cared for each other there'd be some point in this frantic struggle, perhaps. But you don't care for him, and if he cares for you it's mainly vanity and habit."

"But he wouldn't quit me. Especially not for somebody who could give him things I can't."

"That's a point of honor. Or, in other words, a matter of tradition. The tradition of not quitting is an excellent thing, as a tradition; there are times when people shouldn't quit. But this isn't one of them."

"Your own case never is one of them."

"Maybe not. But grant that Carl wouldn't quit you. What does he do for you by staying with you? He gives you nothing; you give him nothing, now. I've no doubt you gave each other some wonderful things, at the beginning; but that's dead now. It's a casualty of this war you've enlisted in."

"It *was* nice when we started," Crystal mused. "And all that *is* dead now—except the forms—the husks. But what would we start with, Roger? The memory that I'd quit something hard for something easy."

"It wouldn't be easy, in a sense. I could give you things—ease, rest, money; but the personal relationship wouldn't be easy. It never is. It would be wonderful and glorious, I think; but not easy."

"I know it. And still I'd like to try it. I don't know you, Roger."

"I don't know myself. Maybe there's nothing there, really, but what you've made in our Sunday evenings. I've been a spectator, except for my one lucky flier that gave me the chance to keep on being a spectator. But I can't be a spectator any longer. The last time Carl glowered at you and whipped one of his sarcasms around your head I wanted to break his neck. If I see that again I will."

"Wait till you and I start wanting to break each other's necks."

"But that's one of the advantages of money. If you and I got in a neck-breaking mood we could put ourselves ten rooms apart till it wore off."

They were silent for a while, and Crystal let her hands rest in his across the table.

"I said I didn't know you," she began presently, "and I don't. But I know you better than I know Carl. I've lost him just as he's lost me. What is he now? An embodied ambition for nothing in particular. Something pushed on by the force of inertia—does inertia push people?—well, you know what I mean. Hope is a terrible thing, Roger; it's ruined more people than despair. No matter what happens Carl won't give up; and that's all I can see in him any more—a blind determination. I know less about him than if he were a stranger. Even strangers you can guess at by their tastes and characteristics. He hasn't time for tastes any more. He's given up theaters and bridge, and the sea-stories he used to love; he reads so many books on ethnology that he hasn't time for fiction.

"And you remember how he used to talk, in college. It was his talk that got me. I loved him when he talked. Anybody would have loved him when he talked. He hasn't talked that way for years. He comes nearer doing it when you're with us than he ever does for me."

"There doesn't seem to be much in it for either of you," said Dilling. "Come to me, Crystal. I want you."

"And I want you. One of me. The real one, I think. But then when you come down to details, and ways and means, it's rather—unpleasant. Even if we could talk it over with Carl, and he agreed to let me go."

"It's easier in Jersey than in New York," said Dilling. "You have a reasonably large assortment of grounds for divorce. If Carl will give you up, it shouldn't be so hard. There's desertion, and non-support——"

"But desertion takes time. And I wouldn't insult poor old Carl by saying he doesn't support me, when he works so hard. Cruelty—I've been as cruel to him as he's been to me. And Carl's true to me—he's too busy not to be even if it ever occurred to him."

"It can be done," said Dilling, "if he'll agree to let you go. I suppose almost any grounds will do if a suit is undefended. But how will he take it? Will he be—reasonable?"

"I don't know. After living with him ten years, I don't know even that. But it seems so unfair to make him take the blame if I quit him. I'd rather pay for what I want; go—go away with you and let Carl divorce me. That would be honest."

"Honest but inconvenient. It isn't much of a black mark any more, but you'd be better off without it. Carl would agree with me there, I think."

"Oh, it's such a tangle," she sighed. "No wonder people stay married. And I don't know yet whether he'd be willing to let us have our way, and I'm not even sure yet that I'm willing. For it would be running away—we can't get around that."

"But if you care for me——"

"If I didn't care for you we wouldn't be talking about it," said Crystal. "Oh, I don't know which of me is the stronger—the housework machine that doesn't know how to stop, or the woman that wants to go with you. Let me think it over."

"All right. Only don't think too long.

For we can't keep up even this much of an understanding behind Carl's back. When he comes back from Washington we'll have to tell him—unless you decide to stay with him. And if you do that I'll not see you any more."

"Oh, Roger! That would be rather—devastating."

"Of course it would. For both of us. But less so than three hours of talk every Sunday night, pretending that nothing had happened."

"He'll be coming back from Washington in three or four days," she said. "I'll have my mind made up then. And we'd better not meet before I make up my mind."

"I suppose not," he agreed. "And if you make up your mind to stay with him we'd better not meet at all. Just tell me over the phone. Yes, I know that will be hard. But that's part of the price we'll pay if you stick to him. There's a price on everything, you know."

"I know it," she said. "And it's rather awful to find out that you've been caught with something you don't want—on the instalment plan. But I don't know. You'd better take me to my train."

They drove down-town in the soft summer evening, their hands clasped on the seat of the taxi between them. At the ferry he helped her out and lifted his hat. Crystal looked at him hesitantly.

"Aren't you going to kiss me—once?"

He shook his head.

"There are probably a dozen people on this ferry who know you. No use starting anything unless we're going to finish it."

"I'm afraid it's been started," she smiled sadly. "Will you call me up once a day?"

"No compromise," he said. "All or nothing. Think it over and you'll agree that's best. I'll see you Sunday—Carl ought to be home on Friday at the latest. I'd forgotten, but I was going to Washington to-night. You'd better tell me where he's staying so I'll be sure not to run into him."

"I suppose you're right, but it seems foolish——"

"Foolish? Why should I see him? He's got my girl."

"She is your girl—this afternoon," said Crystal. "I hope she'll be your girl after next Sunday—forever and ever."

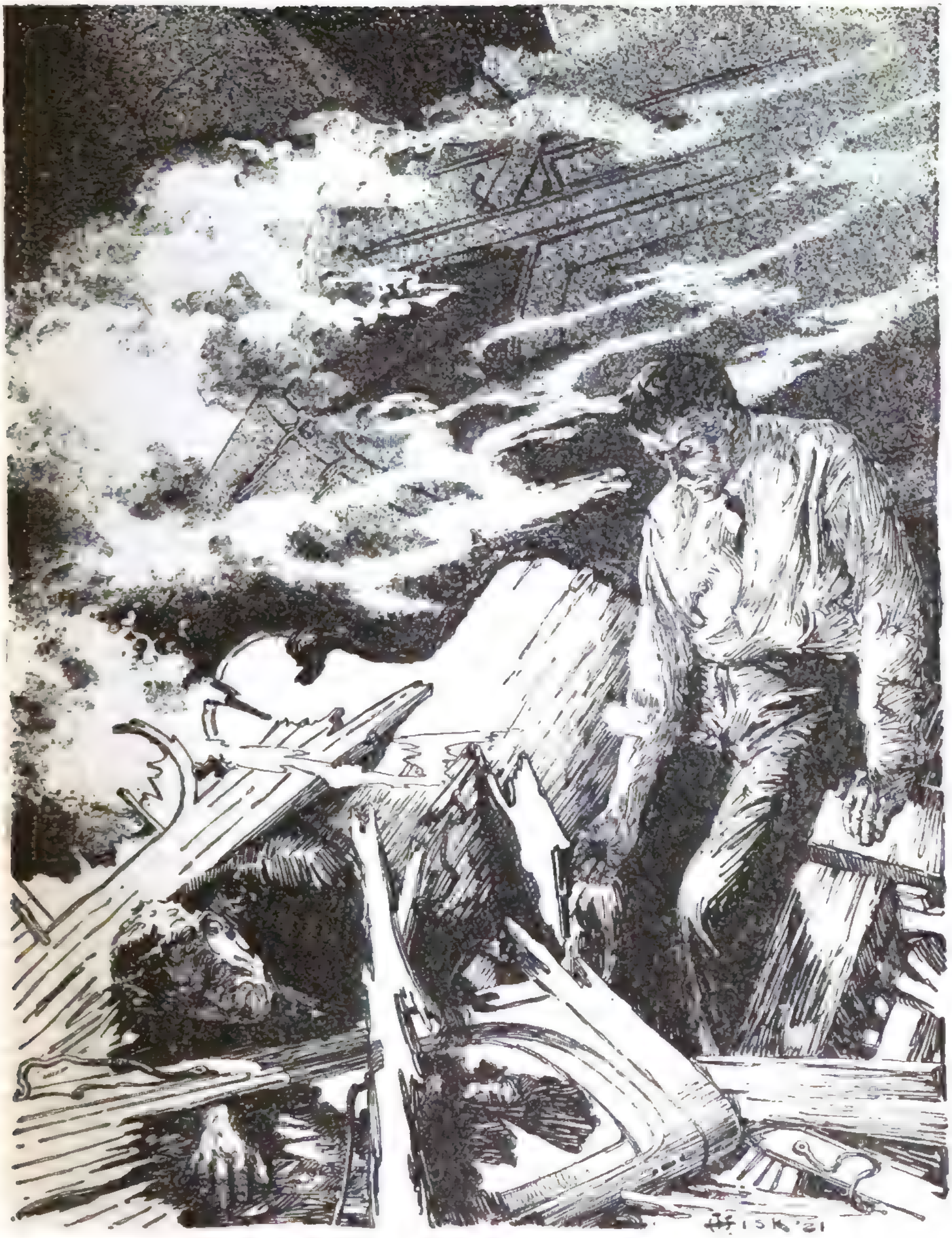
"Amen," said Dilling as she disappeared into the long dim cavern. He was rather depressed at the promptitude with which its darkness swallowed her.

THE summer that was only beginning to fill New York with a friendly warmth had already settled down in sweltering heat on Washington. Dilling found that he was going to be uncomfortable. But then he would be uncomfortable anyway; for doubts and fears had begun to gather as soon as Crystal passed out of his sight. Away from him, in the surroundings of her routine, she would find a thousand arguments for staying with Carl. Everywhere some reminder of a long battle that would have been fought in vain if she went to Dilling. And though it seemed to him the sensible thing for her to accept the loss of those ten years rather than fling other decades after them into the bottomless pit, he knew that the force of long association might draw her the other way.

He went to the Dutch Legation in some haste to get his business over, and was further disheartened at finding that even this trivial matter, which had come to seem important because it was a symbol of new resolves, could not be promptly finished off. An agreeable young secretary told him that the minister was away at a university commencement, where he was receiving an honorary degree; he wouldn't return until Friday. Dilling decided to wait; if he ran into McCalman, he couldn't help it; he would get that map or find out definitely that he couldn't get it. And by good fortune he didn't encounter McCalman in the two days that he killed laboriously, at the ball park in the afternoon and at Keith's in the evening.

Friday found him once more at the legation, and lucky enough, by persistence, to get an interview with the minister. Once face to face with the man who had what he wanted, his arguments suddenly seemed strangely empty. This calm, pleasant, rather bored gentleman was obviously not to be moved by offers of a higher price, though Dilling put his offer in perfunctorily.

"But my dear sir," said the minister, "you know the value of Van Diercks's map. It is a sort of guide to the whole early history of New York, when it was Dutch. You can not blame me if I want this relic of



"Couldn't—chop—me—out—now," McCalman gasped. "Too late. Here—give me that gun."

what was once a possession of my country, for a learned society which would appreciate it at its real worth." He smiled agreeably, the smile of one who finds his position unassailable, and takes a gentle pleasure in the fact.

"Granting the importance of the connection with Holland," said Dilling, "after all, it's a map of New York. It belongs here."

The minister shrugged his shoulders without emotion.

"It was a public auction. You Americans had your chance. If you failed to take it, I don't see why I should give up something that I value because you are willing to pay more money, now that you have thought it over."

And Dilling could say nothing to change him, though he tried as gallantly as he could. The one consolation which he took away as he drove back to his hotel was a faith in the law of averages; he had had bad luck here, perhaps he would have good luck with Crystal.

Evidently, however, bad luck was going to stay with him for a while longer. At the porter's desk in the hotel he stopped to make his Pullman reservation for the trip back to New York, and here he encountered McCalman; McCalman, delighted at the meeting, wondering why Dilling hadn't looked him up——

"But of course you didn't know I was here. What a pity you didn't have some reason to telephone to Crystal. She'd have told you where I was staying. I've just this minute finished up my work in the Smithsonian, and it occurred to me as I passed the hotel that I hadn't got a chair. What train are you taking back? I can go on any of them."

Dilling, in a last effort to avert a companionship that ought to be avoided at any cost, clutched at the hope that a commuter wouldn't want to get home at midnight.

"I still have a few things to attend to," he said. "I can't go before six o'clock."

"Good enough. From that train I can just make the 11:53 out home."

And Dilling gave it up. What was to happen was to happen.

The porter set down their grips beside two chairs facing each other in a stuffy Pullman. McCalman sank down wearily and fanned himself with his evening paper; Dilling hung up his straw hat, bent over his bag, and took out a light plaid cap. McCalman stopped fanning and looked at him curiously.

"I beg your pardon—but I happened to see into your bag. Is that——"

Dilling laughed.

"Yes, it's an automatic. And loaded, too. It's that fool Jap boy of mine. He takes this crime-wave stuff seriously, and whenever I go anywhere he always packs this gun with my pajamas. I try to tell him, but it's no use."

"I thought perhaps you had a bag full of diamonds, or something like that."

"No," said Dilling thoughtfully, "I brought down nothing of value but a check-book that I didn't use. A hold-up man wouldn't find me much of a prize."

McCalman laughed.

"I'm worth twice as much on a train as anywhere else. All my insurance policies have the double indemnity clause—twice the face value of the policy paid to my estate if I'm killed in an accident while traveling. It costs more, but every time I cross the ferry in a fog I'm glad I have it. When I'm worth more than my life insurance I'll feel that I've attained success. Till then, I suppose the greatest favor I could do Crystal would be to get killed in a wreck."

Dilling closed his bag and settled back in his chair as the train began to move.

"Thank Heaven," he said. "This heat is deadly."

"Come out home with me to-night," McCalman proposed. "We're up above the mosquitoes, and there's always a breeze. Crystal won't mind it."

"No," said Dilling. "I want to get back to my apartment."

"I don't blame you; it's a beauty. But, Roger, it isn't like going home to your family. You've seen how we live; Crystal and I are sharp with each other, sometimes; but it's only on the surface. Underneath it we understand. Perhaps that sounds like nonsense to you; I suppose you have the bachelor's view-point. I never did have it—married on the day I graduated, you know. That was really the thing that put us under—I borrowed the money to go on and study for my Ph. D. Three years of it, and two children by the time I got my degree. But it's worth it; you bachelors don't know what life is."

Dilling realized that it was going to be extraordinarily hard to break the news to McCalman—his college friend, who had drawn him into his family circle. McCalman probably counted him his best friend; he would find it hard to understand that Dilling and Crystal had fallen in love before his eyes. Dilling's conscience brought to his attention an inconveniently appropriate phrase. To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. Yet that rule, he reflected, had been laid down as the inexorable law of life; and McCalman didn't really have her, anyway. But it was too hot to think; he lay back wearily in his chair.

THE train jolted to a sudden grinding stop that threw Dilling forward on McCalman's knees. Over the squeak of the air-brakes rose the furious screaming of a whistle. Dilling, rising, looked out through the window at a peaceful countryside, with a cornfield at the bottom of a short slope beside the track. It seemed an impossible setting for tragedy. A final frantic shriek of the whistle, and then a stupendous splintering crash, a shock that all but stunned Dilling as the lights went out. There was a great rending and smashing and the groan of strained timbers as the wooden Pullman, caught between two steel coaches, broke into a heap of kindling wood that slid down the slope to the first rows of the young corn.

Bruised, racked and cut, Dilling found himself in a heap of wreckage when the avalanche at last had stopped. Before him was a huge segment of what had been the ceiling and wall of the car; above him and around him indistinguishable ruin, a long girder holding the mass somehow in place. Slowly he drew himself out from the split boards and shattered glass; realized that he was free, that he could move, that apparently his injuries were only scratches. He stood up, clear of the wreckage, and looked up and down the track at the line of overturned coaches in the gathering dusk—long dark masses from which men were crawling. The deafening crash of the collision had been followed by a moment of stunned silence; but now there were new noises; shouts, sickening groans.

Dilling pulled himself together and called to McCalman.

"Right here," said a voice in the battered junk heap out of which Dilling had crawled. "Are you all right? I'm caught—give me a hand."

Dilling flung away some timbers and came with unexpected suddenness on the head and shoulders of McCalman. What had been a chair was across his middle, and a pile of long timbers was jammed against its frame.

"Maybe you can move it," McCalman panted. "Don't think I'm hurt much; the chair kept everything else off. But I can't get out."

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Dilling stooped down and pulled at the chair with all his force; straightened up, threw off his coat and vest and collar, and pulled again. Nothing stirred. As he straightened up once more, gasping for breath, he saw a red glare rising from the wreckage at the other end of the car. Men were shouting farther down the line, and he heard the blows of an ax; but no one seemed near them. He remembered that they had been almost alone in the Pullman.

"Maybe I can find a timber to use as a lever," he said. "Feel all right?"

McCalman seemed less nervous than he had ever been at his own dinner-table.

"All right so far," he grunted. "That fire's down at the other end of the car, isn't it? I think those are our suitcases down under my knees; dig them out. Perhaps I can come after them."

Dilling tugged at the exposed end of McCalman's battered suitcase, then at his own shiny buff bag. They came out without difficulty, and he set them down at his feet.

"That's luck," said McCalman. "No casualties so far but two straw hats. Now if I can edge out there— No use; the chair still holds me."

There followed a period of frantic effort which Dilling could never remember very well. Perhaps he was dazed, perhaps only frightened. For the fire was now leaping from the other end of the car; it was crawling up the nearer timbers; he began to feel its heat. One timber after another he tried as a lever, but vainly. He remembered an interval of hunting for the ax which must have been carried somewhere in their end of the car; but it had disappeared. Then he cried for help. The roar of the fire, and the chorus of other cries that rose to the evening sky, drowned his shouts.

McCalman was strangely quiet; his head moved a little, but at Dilling's question he insisted that he was all right.

"Won't be all right much longer, though," he added. "It looks as if maybe Crystal will get that double indemnity, eh?"

His effort was pathetically inadequate; he bit the words off sharply, and Dilling, a moment later, saw his teeth sinking into his lower lip. Dilling shouted again and made another desperate effort to move the chair. The fire came nearer. He remembered later a man, two men, who came at last through the smoke, and looked at McCalman, and swore.

"If we had an ax," one of them began.

"Mebbe we can get that one down at the diner," the other suggested. "You stay here, George; I'll get it."

But apparently George, too, went for help. Dilling was alone once more, working now furiously, blindly, his breath coming in short sobs. The fire was within ten feet. He found himself wondering if at last he couldn't understand something of what Crystal and her husband had lived through in these ten years; a killing, helpless, futile struggle against immovable obstacles, with destruction always nearer.

Suddenly McCalman cried out:

"Stop, you fool! You're getting nowhere."

"I'll have it in a minute," Dilling panted.

"No, you won't. Stand up and listen to me."

McCalman's face was clear in the wavering firelight; his lips bloody, his muscles twitching.

"Here!" he grunted. "Got your bag? Where's that gun of yours? I won't be burned."

Dilling had the automatic in his hand before his brain began to work again.

"Don't be a fool, Carl. We'll get you out. They'll come back with the ax——"

"Couldn't—chop—me—out—now," McCalman gasped. "Too — late. Here—Give me the gun."

Dilling's soul stood somewhere a great way off and watched his mind working. The mind reviewed, with what seemed amazing slowness, the probability that suddenly Crystal was to be freed—and McCalman would never have to be told. And then it found itself confronted by the unreasoning inhibition; he mustn't let a man kill himself.

"Hurry up," McCalman screamed. "I can't wait forever."

Dilling stooped down and gave him the pistol.

"The safety catch is still on," he said. "Don't—yet. Wait till the last minute. Maybe I can stop the fire."

"Can't," said McCalman, as was obviously true. This roaring blaze was a matter for a fire engine. Some one was emptying a bucket at its farther side, but to no purpose.

"Here," said McCalman. "Tell Crystal I'm sorry I swore at her. She's a good sport. She'll have enough to take care of the kids, with this double indemnity."

Dilling turned away and looked out across the cornfield, his nerves set for the report. It did not come. A moment, and he heard McCalman's voice in a new frenzy of horror—

"Dilling! Roger Dilling!"

Dilling turned and bent over him.

"Suicide!" McCalman gasped. "Those policies wouldn't be any good. Crystal—no money. Here!" He thrust the pistol into Dilling's limp hand. "You do it."

"My God, I can't!"

"Hurry up!" yelled McCalman. "I won't be burned. Listen to the others. Shoot me, you fool."

Dilling held his pistol helplessly at his side and hesitated. The blaze hadn't reached McCalman, but two minutes more would be too late. He couldn't decide. He couldn't shoot the man who stood between him and Crystal; but he couldn't let McCalman burn. Another idea came into the milling turmoil of his thoughts. Wouldn't it be suicide anyway if he shot McCalman at McCalman's command? He must ask him; maybe McCalman knew insurance law. Crystal—freedom—but he couldn't.

"Hurry up!" yelled McCalman once more. "Roger, for God's sake—I'd do it for you."

Dilling raised the pistol and aimed between McCalman's eyes, then lowered it. He felt his hand moving aimlessly up and down; his finger refused to crook. Not that way—he couldn't get Crystal that way.

Somewhere in the blazing mass a burnt-through timber broke with a great shower of sparks. With a groan the pile of flames sank and sagged; a piece of charred wood, broken off, fell at Dilling's feet. He started at the scorching heat, and then saw that the heap of lumber jammed against the chair had fallen away. He swooped down, buried his fingers in the green plush around the iron frame, and pulled. It lifted easily; and McCalman, roused into desperate action, flung himself forward, rolled over a mass of wreckage, and fell on his face in the furrow beside the nearest row of corn, sobbing aloud.

Dilling was sobbing too when he came to himself, and found that he was stumbling along beside the wrecked train, a hundred yards below the blazing Pullman. There were more men about, now, and a row of writhing bodies in the edge of the cornfield. He wandered on again, aimlessly. He remembered clutching at a man in overalls and trying to tell him that he couldn't shoot because he didn't know whether the law would call it suicide. But the man in overalls went on.

A long time later—it was full night, the burning car had died to a heap of embers, and searchlights from the wrecking train were playing on the ruins—he once more got something like control of his nerves. He was standing in a road that crossed the tracks, and many men were moving about him. It seemed desperately important that he should explain his dilemma; he couldn't talk about Crystal, but that point about the suicide by another's hand—. And somewhere in the back of his mind was a horrible fact that he apprehended dimly, but refused to look at; that McCalman had been within six inches of death and was still alive, still between him and Crystal.

He found himself presently talking to a young man who, though he was writing something all the while, seemed to be properly interested in his story.

"Wouldn't shoot himself, eh? Because his wife and children couldn't get the insurance if he committed suicide. By God! How many children? Two? Do you know their names? Yes, I understand. You were in college. I see—fire within six inches. Hadn't reached him yet? He isn't burned? But you'd have had to do it in another moment. I see. When the burning car fell in and eased the pressure. Then he crawled out—is that right? Did you pull him out?"

"No," Dilling heard himself saying, "he rolled out."

"Don't know how much insurance he carried, do you? I see. What did you say your address is, Mr. Dilling? All right. Here's a shock case for you, doc."

"But wait!" cried Dilling as the young man walked away. "Would it have been—suppose I'd shot him——"

"There, now, take it easy," said a voice behind him. He turned, saw a man in a white coat, and collapsed.

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BY MIDNIGHT Dilling had recovered enough to be taken back to Washington in a touring car, along with other slightly injured survivors. They were all silent—harrowingly, appallingly silent. Dilling felt only a terrible weariness; his brain, luckily, wouldn't work. He went back to the hotel he had left in the afternoon, and went to sleep.

The noon sunlight was sifting in around his lowered shade when he awoke, sore and smarting. Mechanically he telephoned an order for breakfast, and for a New York paper; and the boy who brought the paper brought a telegram, too.

> Coming to Washington to look after Carl. I'll write you later. CRYSTAL.

That seemed to be settled. The shock, he knew, would presently descend on him, but he was grateful for every moment of respite. Later he could try to puzzle out her motive; now he took up the paper, and turned to the story headed

34 Die in Wreck near Washington

Over in the second column he found the paragraphs toward which his subconscious self had been leading him.

> A remarkable example of fortitude and heroism was displayed by Dr. Carl McCalman, the ethnologist, who suffered two broken ribs, but narrowly escaped a terrible fate. McCalman, with a life-long friend, Roger Dilling of 25 West Forty-fourth Street, New York, was in the shattered Pullman. Dilling escaped with slight injuries, but McCalman was wedged in the wreckage and unable to extricate himself as the flames neared him.
>
> Drawing a pistol which he carried, he was about to shoot himself to escape death by fire when he was halted by the thought that suicide, even under such circumstances, might invalidate his life insurance policies and leave his wife and children penniless. Summoning his resolution, he put the pistol aside and awaited his fate. Dilling, unable to endure the prospect of his friend's torture, took the pistol and was about to take the responsibility of ending McCalman's life before the fire reached him when the collapse of the burning

framework of the car, as told above, shifted the chair that imprisoned McCalman and enabled him to roll free. Dilling, unnerved by the shock, was found by ambulance surgeons, wandering aimlessly, more than an hour later, but was able after treatment to return to his hotel.

"I suppose I told that fellow some of it," Dilling mused, "and he guessed the rest. It's about as near right as the papers ever get anything. I suppose I ought to ask about McCalman. Let's see—what hospital did they say——"

But as he was looking through the list of injured a bellboy brought him a letter. It had come by messenger, he learned, and no reply was expected. Dilling tore it open with the dull conviction that this was the end, and it was. Crystal had scribbled on a piece of hospital stationery:

> Just arrived and found Carl resting easily. Of course I'll stay with him now. He would have gone through fire for me, and I couldn't quit him after that—even if you hadn't made it impossible. Good-by, Roger—I didn't know you or Carl either, it seems. But we never know each other, do we? Or ourselves. Don't try to see me again—please.
>
> CRYSTAL.
>
> P. S.—I'd made up my mind to stay with Carl, even before I heard of the wreck.

And Dilling knew that that postscript was a gallant lie—a lie that she hoped might convince him, and herself. If there had been no wreck she would have come to him; but Carl had been a good soldier and she would be one too. He drew out the pad of telegram blanks from his table drawer and addressed a message to his Japanese boy:

"Engage me passage for Buenos Aires, next boat."

"That's the end of that," he said to himself. But he knew that this was a lie, too.

ANOTHER Sunday night in the McCalman's living-room. Crystal had been trying to play some of her old music, but had given it up and was restlessly moving about the room.

"Sit down, can't you?" her husband demanded, though with an obvious effort to soften the rasp in his voice. He was bending over a scrapbook and pasting a newspaper clipping into it beside a row of book reviews.

"Fills the last page very neatly," he said, straightening up. "For an accident that might have been a disaster, that affair turned out pretty well. You and I both got a good rest at the hospital, with the railroad paying all expenses and a nurse for the children besides; and I think more people saw this piece in the paper than ever read all the reviews of all my books. And it called me 'the ethnologist,' too; did you notice that? Of course it cost us Roger. Queer of him to run off like that, but I saw the reporter that talked to him, and he said Roger had all the symptoms of nervous collapse."

Crystal had settled down in her rickety armchair, staring moodily into the cold fireplace.

"Might have thought I'd get the nervous shock, if anybody," McCalman continued, filling his pipe. "But I suppose the jolt in the ribs was a sort of counter-irritant. Besides, Roger has had an easy life; never any hard decisions to make, as near as I can gather. I suppose it upset him completely when I shoved the gun into his hand and told him to shoot me."

"You told him to shoot you?" Crystal repeated in a flat, breathless tone.

"Why, yes. Didn't I tell you? I know the paper got it rather mixed, but I thought by the time I was well enough to talk to you that you'd heard the whole thing. Lord, you didn't think he'd gone crazy and tried it of his own accord? Technically, I believe, it would have been a crime anyway; but any jury would have let him off, as long as I asked him. But it's lucky he didn't have to. When this book comes out we can take a real rest."

"You told him to shoot you," Crystal said again, her voice dying away into a whisper.

"Why— Oh, I know it looks like quitting; but it was that or be burned. And I supposed if he shot me the insurance would be all right. I've asked a lawyer since and he tells me I was wrong about that; so it's lucky Roger lost his nerve. It was almost funny to see his arm moving up and down, pointing the gun at me and then away. Somehow he couldn't bring himself to do it."

The Hereditary Punch

A Prize Ring, Two Very Determined, Square-Jawed Antagonists and a Gentle But Firm Referee

By William Bullock

THE great manager came hurrying out of the kitchen door of Durkee's Hotel. He took his firm stand in the middle of the yard, his stop-watch ready in his hand. A friendly lop-eared foxhound rose up against his knees; a scraggy terrier circled him, yelping a welcome. All dumb animals were his friends; but at present he had no care or interest in them. For the time being he was all business; and the way he thumbed the face of his watch showed that he was growing a trifle impatient.

"Hurry up, boys," he called suddenly. "Get a hustle on." With this he turned and winked at me. "They never like to hit the dust, and it's the chief part." Again he faced the ramshackle rear of Durkee's frame hostelry. "A little more pep, boys; that's all."

Out came Andy Moakley, the tall, erect young heavyweight and Jackey Farley, the handy two-fisted featherweight, pet of Tim Breslin's stable of first-class fighting men. They were wrapped in sweaters of many colors, and shod in the heavy shoes in which they had tramped for Uncle Sam overseas.

"Away you go now, my hearties!" was Tim's greeting. "All the way to Magee's crossroads and back again." The youngsters pretended that they were overjoyed by linking arms and doing a few jig steps in front of their trainer. "I give you forty-five minutes for them five miles," allowed Tim. "If you're one second over, I'll send you to the hay half-short on your chops and French fried." He struck a starter's pose. "On your marks—set—go!"

He stood there, poised and watching intently, until both boys had got into their strides and were thumping at a steady clip along the highway, then relaxing into his complacent, easy-going self, he strolled over and dropped into the big rocker under the apple-tree.

"They look good to me," I remarked, by way of opening.

"They all look good till they stack up against a better man," returned the sage Breslin, and silence fell between us. It lasted while Tim extracted two of his huge Havanas from the top pocket of his rotund vest, passed one to me and, leaning forward, squinted through the smoke at the disappearing glovemen. At last he sat back and addressed himself to me.

"That big boy is an everlasting reminder to myself of a lad that, in an out-of-the-way manner, wrote his name deep in pugilistic history. You see him, Moakley there, loping along—" Tim waved an arm in the direction of the distant figure—"I've given him three chances he's not entitled to, for no other reason than he calls back Tug McCarthy, and the recollection is so sweet and consoling. Yes," he went on reflectively, "Moakley ran into a knockout in Salt Lake City simply because he pursued his own plan of battle instead of mine, and by the same sure method he got set down on a couple of decisions later on. Some managers would let that go with a shake of their head. But that's not my reg'lar way. In the fight game it's the same as in everything else. If you haven't got discipline you ain't got nothing. No, sir. Lacking discipline, it's a knockout every time."

He sat musing a few moments, then wagged his hoary head. "I'll say that Moakley is a headstrong youth, but—you never can tell; maybe he'll outgrow it. Any man that's got the rangy build and the fine underpinnings and the resolute temperament of Tug McCarthy is likely to go great guns sooner or later. But, anyway, we're all so constituted we like to fool ourselves once in a while. And for just nothing more than that Andy Moakley is the living picture of Tug, I've given him his three unearned chances, and, foolish-like, will give him many another. All this is under your chest, you understand, and——"

The great manager broke off once more and sat deep in thought, as if getting his bearings on the doings of past days. At length he looked at me, a smile, the meaning of which I knew well, lighting up his genial eyes. "I was never telling you of Tug, was I?" he inquired.

"No, never one word," I said encouragingly.

"Well, it was this here way," returned Tim, crossing his arms like the old prints of the Tipton Slasher.

IT WAS in the good old days of the Horton Law. I had a likely heavy—a crusty customer going by the name of Battleship Burke—dated up for the Broadway Athletic Club, and was getting him in shape down at Seabright. I'd hired a cottage on the ocean front, and had a ring rigged in the open yard out back. One morning I was luxuriating on the porch, smoking quietly and watching Battleship play porpoise in the surf, when the telephone rang. I answered it sort of miffed; but when I heard who's on the wire I pricked up my ears and was all attention. It was no one else than Samuel Waters.

You've heard tell of Sam Waters, haven't you? Or was he too far ahead of your time? But no matter. When he gave his name, I fell to scratching my noodle with my free hand in great wonder. You'll find millionaires rubbing elbows with fight managers in ringside seats; but at other times they're what you might call offish. Sam Waters was like all his kind; giving us the cold go-by in the streets and trolley-cars, then on fight nights offering to bet a million or two on the man of his choice and hollering for him to knock the other guy's block off.

Oh, yes, I knew him well by looks; but so far we hadn't struck up what you might call a speaking acquaintance. Only once when he was going out from a Garden show, all dolled in the soup-and-nuts, he tarried behind his gang to let drop the remark, "That boy of yours will make a good mixer in a soda-fountain."

I heard him all right; but made no reply, seeing that I was busy bringing the poor lad back from happy dreams, stretched full length on the floor of the ring. But some time later, when this same youngster had fought his way back to recognition and had just put the finishing touches on the lightweight champ, I leaned over, happy and gloating, and shouted at Moneybags Sam, "What do you say now of my ham fighter?" He chuckled and waved back in return, "You've got the laugh on me—he's choice ham."

That was the full extent of our acquaintance, and—well, here he was on the other end of the wire, asking me to come right away and see him in Wall Street.

The same afternoon I tripped over the rugs and sank nearly out of sight in a chair beside his mahogany desk. He wasted no time on preliminaries, but got right down to business.

"I have a son who is causing me a lot of worry these days," he said. "Benjamin is my only boy, my sole kin, and with his mother dead, I'm naturally all wrapped up in him. I want him here in the business. I don't mind telling you there's a young lady I'd like him to marry." He hesitated a moment, then rattled on: "You see, I'm anxious for you to know just where I stand—some day he'll inherit all I've got in the world. He's a student now at Princeton, and he has a fight bee in his bonnet." Then old Sam Waters leaned across the corner of the desk and fixed his sharp eyes on me. "I want you to knock that bee out of him."

I was wise right off. But I followed my bent and feinted him a bit. Moreover, you'll understand, the desire of that son of his didn't seem a crime to me. No, sir!

There was something out of place in Sam Waters's objections to his son's wanting to get handy with the gloves—he, the champion bruiser of his acrimonious gang! All his long life he had been walloping the other fellow in Wall Street. And he didn't go about it wearing gloves on his hands. No! He hit them with a lead pipe when they weren't looking; or hid behind a door and bounced a chair off their bald spot; or else put a happy end to it by dropping the safe on them when they were passing on the sidewalk. And do you think he let one of his victim's grab a loser's end? Not he! They were lucky if he left them a shirt and a nickel for car-fare. In the ring a man has an even chance—but as I was saying, I feinted him a trifle, and he didn't like it. He was built for rushing the fight from the tap of the gong.

"Listen to me, Breslin," he said. "I have the boy's life mapped out for him. I want, first of all, to see him tamed of his wild streak and settled down. The only thing standing in the way is the fight bug he's got. He's been bowling over the boys at college, and is all puffed up. You've got a hefty scrapper in your camp in Seabright, haven't you? My son and I will drop past, and you'll be sitting on the porch. One thing will lead to another. Your scrapper will be going through his paces, and my son's spirits will begin bubbling. You'll ask him if he'd like to try a round or two, and I'll come along at the right time with my consent. There's just one thing I want your man to do: give my son a good beating." Then old Sam Waters sat still, piercing me with his steely eyes. "I'll pay you well for it."

"If he was my boy," I said, "I'd act different."

"Never mind about that," he shot back. "If you don't take the contract somebody else will."

"What age is the lad and how much does he scale?" I asked.

"He's near twenty-one and weighs round one-seventy-five."

"I have a young heavy that will do him up brown," I said. "You can fix your own day and hour."

We fixed the date and I was heading out of the door when he called me back. "I know you're thinking of me as a marble-heart," he said almost gently. "But it's best, after all, for the boy. He's been set against me, of late, in everything. I told you there is a young woman I want him to marry. It's a wish that is dear to me as a father—I want him started right. Last night he called at her home with a split lip and a mouse under his right eye." Old Waters walked over, holding out his hand. "I know the manly ways of you men of the ring, and I hope that you won't have a bad opinion of me. It's only that the boy needs a lesson. I've got to manage him for his own good. Better rough treatment for once and all than for him to keep on the way he's been going."

Next day I was rocking on the porch, and when the car came along I waved my hand. Sam Waters jumped out and greeted me as if I had been his long-lost pal. Then in no time we were out back near the ring, watching Battleship Burke play a tune with the bag on the sounding-board. After a bit I ordered him to get ready for a practise round with one of the welters in my string. At that I saw dad touching his boy on the arm, and heard him innocently asking, "How would you like to go on for a round or two?"

The lad fairly jumped at the chance. He was nearly tickled to death, that's the truth of it. I fitted him out with an extra set of togs, and the next moment they were facing each other inside the ropes. Then what did I want to do, but run away and hide!

That Waters lad was one of the shapliest I'd ever seen, and I've blinked the best in the land. He stood a full six feet, and his head sat firm on a strong neck, that, in turn, slipped into a pair of shoulders made for nothing else but endurance and speed. He was full and broad and deep in the chest, and tapered down in just the way a man should. He appeared all the more a scrapper for the mouse under his right eye; and, looking at him, all fine and promising as he stood there, I found myself saying in my ear, "Oh, if you was a son of mine, it's me that would be proudly and gently nursing you along."

Well, they went at it, and it was a crying shame! The boy was game—he didn't have a sign of yellow or quit in his make-up. He had everything except the one most necessary thing. What chance has a greenhorn against a trained fighter of the ring? Not as much as this cigar I'm burning to dry ashes.

They went round after round, and I wanted to stop it. But the boy had his temper up, and a sure-enough temper it was. And Battleship Burke was one of the cruel kind, finding delight when the chance offered in hacking and chopping a weak opponent to ribbons. I felt I must talk and reason with the royal youngster's dad.

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But old Sam Waters had his square jaw set like a vise, and said to let it go on, that it was all for the good of his son. But soon it got so that even I, supposed to be a hard-shell, can stand it no more. After one round when the game college boy had taken a particularly fierce lacing, I slipped over to Burke's corner and whispered that if he didn't knock him out the first second they came together again I'd go and get a gun. That was the merciful way out of it; no man feels a clean knockout, and it leaves no mark and no sting. Burke looked at me and saw I meant it every word, and—the lad was out five minutes or more.

When he came to I was sick at heart and ashamed. It wasn't playing fair; all of us were guilty of a shyster trick. What else? I worked over that boy as if he was my very own, praising him, treating the several and many bumps he'd sustained. Not only that, but I rubbed him down with my own two hands and helped him into his clothes.

All the time I was talking to him, trying to make him feel good. But he had his jaw set and said hardly a word; then when I looked inquiringly at him, I saw that that chin of his had the same cut as the iron jaw of his dad. He was upset considerable, I'll say, but he strove hard to hold his feelings shut tight inside him.

The father and son drove away, and next day a fat check turned up in the mail. I hated at first to touch the thing; it hadn't come on the square. But then, I thought, I'd be the last man alive to leave a red cent with Flinty Sam Waters, if the chance came my way. So I cashed it, and put the whole sad incident in mental storage. It was over and done, with small credit to myself.

A few nights later Battleship made short work of his man before a packed house in the Broadway Athletic. Sam Waters was one of the cheering mob. But he hardly looked at me. Not that I cared a bit—I'm particular about my friends.

A SERIES of engagements took me out West, and the Battleship kept going full speed ahead. We were getting fatter purses right along, so I was feeling happy and thinking I had my fast cruiser pointing his nose in the direction of the championship.

Then one evening in Denver after we'd wound up our business in two rounds, a telegram came to hand, asking if we wouldn't play a Labor Day date in Cripple Creek. The inducement was considerable, and the name of Tug McCarthy spelled no danger to my Battleship's aspirations. So I wired back we'd be rejoiced to give them a glad holiday, and was only regretting they couldn't stack us up against Big Jeff, the world's champ, himself. We loafed a few days, seeing the sights of Denver. Then bright and early on a September morning we dropped off in the woolly mining-camp.

A Citizens' Committee, packing guns and yelling a blue streak, gave us a hot reception, and I spent a few joyous hours without thinking once of the scrap in hand. The strong suit of my Battleship was sinking local prides, and it made me smile to think what was going to happen to Master Tug McCarthy.

Sitting out a couple of bum prelims, I thought of Tug just once. That was when I wondered, quite casually, if he paid his small weekly board by swinging a pick in the mines far under ground, or maybe by dealing cards in a faro layout in the back room of a saloon. Most all the time I was chatting gaily with the members of the Citizens' Committee, so little worry had I of the work ahead.

Finally the crowd started hollering and I saw Battleship crowding his way down the crammed aisle. It made me feel fine to pipe the wide grin he was wearing; for that told me he was all-fired confident, which is half the battle. He pushed on and came toward me waving his hand gleefully. "Guess who's the soft thing we've picked this lucky day?" he said. "You've got me, Battleship; shoot the glad news," I returned. He laughed out loud. "It's that college ham from Seabright." I jumped straight up, I was that surprised. "What!" I yelled. "Tug McCarthy and Sam Waters's son is one and the same?"

Before Battleship could answer, I felt a pluck on my sleeve and, turning, I looked into the eyes of young Waters himself. "Are you crazy or what?" I demanded. But he never blinked. "I've been getting ready to even up with you and your Battleship for a whole year," he said, cocky as could be. "I'm going to fire a couple of torpedoes into him, and sink him like a water-logged derelict."

Big words never put a man down for the

count, and I couldn't help feeling sorry for the deluded youngster. That is, I felt that there way till I saw them square off in the ring. Yes—and I'm an old hand in the game. One peek at a man and I can write you a book about him; what I got in my first peek at Ben Waters was sure an eyeful.

He had grown and put on solid flesh till he had all the marks of a real glove artist; he was brown as a berry from a long siege of training in the sun and air. As far as looks went, he was fit and ready for the fight of his life, and a stiff fight at that. Then when he put up his hands it didn't take me five seconds to see he had picked up more than the rudiments of the trade.

Yes, sirree; he had come on the scene all equipped, and already was going after my Battleship as if he was a mere wheezing tugboat. In less'n a minute it had grown into a real grudge fight, one of the few I've run across in my long, long time. You hear tell of grudge fights every so often; but mostly they're just a press-agent's gag. Not this time, though. When least expecting it, the Battleship and me had steamed into one head on.

You've guessed it! The boy had his sweet, heart-gratifying revenge. He burst shells all over my clumsy tub of a canal barge. He peppered him in the boilers and bunkers with solid shot and high explosives. He raked him fore and aft; punctured him full of holes below the water-line; spread his deck with tons of gore, and wound up by blowing him sky-high and scattering him in fragments across the face of the bounding main.

I worked over my peerless stone scow as I never worked over a man up against it before. But what use? That millionaire's son had his number from the first rap of the gong. I could see that Waters could end it whenever he felt like it; but he was carrying it along, paying back my heartless, cruel-minded heavy, blow for blow; and standing off, without scratch or mark on him, saying, calm and quiet, he was going to send in another and another in extra payment for that Seabright score. And, by cricky, he did. Not once nor twice, but a hundred times over. Now and then I looked at his set jaw and thought of the chin I'd seen on his dad.

It was tough, I tell you. The Battleship never got started; never had a chance to get up steam. In the middle of the tenth the college lad looked over at me. "Here he goes," he said. And as sure as you're alive the next thing I saw was my heavy's heels going up and his head going down, striking the ring floor with a whack that settled the argument then and there.

Without waiting for as much as one of the count, the winner came and leaned over the ropes and laughed down at me. He had a right to laugh, but there was nothing mean in it. "Your Battleship is going down by the head," he said. "What'll you take for the battered and shattered hulk?"

I sprang up on the ring platform, with only the ropes separating us. "If you'll only let me manage you," I begged him, "we'll walk straight into the heavyweight championship." He never stirred, but just held his strong jaw shut tight. Then, all excitement, I added, "Aye, just that—champ of the world! You're a humdinger, Mr. Waters!"

"Tug McCarthy is my name," he shot back.

"Tug or any darned handle you want to go by," I returned. "Let me manage you, and we'll take Jeff and Fitz, one and all of them, into camp."

But he only laughed in a cool, exasperating way, and looked round at Battleship, now struggling to his hands and knees, wondering how many fathoms he'd been down. "You'd better throw your poor old wreck a life-line," said Tug McCarthy to me, and trotted sprightly to his corner.

Later on I made some inquiries and found out several things. Tug was traveling round with two sparring partners and a Jap to look after his trunks of clothes. Outside the ring he was the dude of dudes. He had bought up half the one hotel in the place for himself and his paid hands, and had their eats served in the rooms in grand style. He'd breezed into Cripple Creek only ten days before, and had got the Citizens' Committee together and made all suggestions and sundry for the big holiday at the expense of me and the Battleship.

In the business line Tug was like a leaf from his dad's book. He was his own manager, and a good one I'll allow. He wrote and sent off the telegram that had lured my Battleship from Denver to a watery grave. He hung up the purse that came my way; and then, I learned, pulled down five times

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that sum from the takings at the gate. Before I'd picked up half the story I could see that Tug had it in him to become the great financier of the Squared Circle. Which was another strong incentive for me to try to land him under my wing.

I laid for one of his sparring partners and took him off in a corner. But just when I'm starting to quiz him good, who should bob up but Tug himself, togged out like he was parading Fifth Avenue at four of a fine afternoon. He ordered his hired man away, and looked reproachfully at me.

"Why bother your head with a man like that?" he said in a purring voice that might have meant anything or nothing. "I'll save you all the trouble. I'll tell you all you want to know, without you asking one question."

"You're a wonderful boy in more ways than one, Mr. Waters," I said, laughing.

"Tug McCarthy, I told you once before," he came back, nettled.

"Oh, aye, Tug; I was just forgetting," I replied, trying to soothe him.

"Dad and you put up a game on me," he said, straight off. "And you both think to this day that you got away with it. I saw you putting your heads together when Battleship Burke began to pound me in that first round in Seabright. It wasn't hard to figure, anyway; for why should your plug-ugly go after me in that vicious way? He couldn't have worked harder if there was a purse in sight. But the big mistake you made was in letting Burke stand with me under the shower. He was feeling so merry at having chopped a novice into mincemeat that he wanted to let out the secret first thing. I heard what your orders to him were, and never said a word." The lad waited a while, as if letting it sink in. Then with a queer smile, he asked, "What do you think of it all now?"

"I can think of nothing only your consent for me to manage you," I said.

But he never seemed to hear. "Dad thinks he knows me and that I don't know him," he continued. "Lots of fathers are built that way. He wanted to beat ambition out of me. He succeeded in beating it in. He tried in other things to bend my will to his own, but——"

Tug stopped so suddenly it struck me that he was talking now of the girl his dad had picked out for him.

"He didn't think to tie you up to a young thing of his own choosing, did he?" I asked, heedless and thoughtless.

"If he ever tried that on me, and got the promise of the Queen of Sheba, I'd pack her off to King Solomon; that's what I'd do," declared Tug in strong tones.

"Oh, I well know you would want to win the queen yourself," I laughed; then said to myself, "well, there's the end of that much!"

"You didn't suppose, did you," started Tug again, "that I'd let Battleship Burke get away with that trimming he handed me? Not in twice two thousand years. I vowed to show up him and yourself and dad by becoming a real gloveman. I just followed in dad's footsteps—asked nobody's advice save my own."

"You're a good little adviser," I put in.

"And I'm going on the way I started, without you or any one else." He stopped again, giving me that same queer smile. Then he tilted his head. "Is that enough for you, and will you let my sparring partners alone?"

I allowed it was, and told him so. But with the added word I'd still be hoping for him to let me take hold of him some day and steer him to the top of the ladder. He only waved a hand lightly, and was on his way.

I sat down to meditate. Here was the man I'd been dreaming all my life of managing; right at hand he was, but still so far off I couldn't lay finger on him. What was I to do? I hiked down Main Street and sent this telegram, collect, to Sam Waters in Wall Street:

"The bee in your son's bonnet has become a whole hive and has just stung Battleship Burke to death."

I signed it with my plain "Tim Breslin," and let it go at that. Next morning the answer came. It was short and to the point.

"Meet me Planters' Hotel, St. Louis, Friday," it says; not a word more.

I sent Battleship into drydock, or to be specific, back home to Galveston, and turned up at the Planters' Hotel Friday evening. I found Sam Waters in his room with his coat and collar off and his shirt-sleeves rolled above his fat elbows. It was one of those late hot days in the hottest town between the Atlantic and Pacific; and he was fanning himself by the open window and blowing dense clouds from one of his whopping big cigars. He ordered ice-water and fixings for the two of us. Then, showing no more feeling than a clam, he sat back, and said for me to tell him everything.

I did, not leaving out one word. And all the time his face was like a mask; it was the first time he'd heard of his son in over half a year; but the only thing that appeared to bother him was the heat. I couldn't help wondering what was passing in his mind. I laid it on thick about how his boy had rammed and sunk the Battleship; but he heard it without the flicker of an eyelash, and there was no move from him when I was done. The way he was acting was fast getting on my nerves, even though I could see he was thinking hard about some phase of it. Finally he swung round and said,

"We've got to find some one to lick him."

"You don't mean to tell me," I rejoined, "that you're still going after the boy the way you did in Seabright?"

"Don't bother about me, Breslin," he snapped back sharply. "All I want you to do is go out and dig up some one who will knock my son flat on his back and end his ring career."

What use to tell of our drawn-out confab? The long and the short of it was that I took the assignment, with a liberal monthly bit, and a big wad to come when I finally succeeded in putting the boy down for the ten-count. Deep inside I didn't want the undertaking, but what could a plain fight manager do?

I STARTED hot on the trail of Tug McCarthy. First I ran up to Winnipeg for a heavy who had been breaking loose there and in the far Northwest. He looked mighty sweet, and I called two men, one from Chicago and one from Hoboken, to round him into the best possible trim. I put him through a row of sprouts for six weeks and started him in Calgary where he handled himself in nifty style, winning in the fourth. Then I bumped into Tug in Seattle and signed up for ten rounds to a decision in Portland.

But there wasn't no decision. The affair came to an end in forty seconds, with the Canuck taking a nap in his own corner as if an alarm-clock had never been invented. I wired the result to Wall Street, and in due time comes the answer, "Try again."

I tried again. I tried six times in a row. Yes, sirree—that college lad was some scrapper! It isn't all in the sinews and the clenched fists—not that he wasn't as classy and sturdy a man as you'd want to lay eyes on in the ring. All of that he was; but he had something else that you don't find on the average gloveman—a head.

The wise manager informs himself about what the rival camp is doing; and I found out only smart things about that young man. He was sticking to duty every minute; the fight had begun for him the instant he put his John Hancock to the articles. And here's a detail, mighty important: Tug McCarthy never wet his lips with strong drink and never touched a coffin tack. No; he was the cleanest-living lad I ever run across, and I've called them all by their first names from Jake Kilrain to Jack Dempsey.

Maybe it was because the boy was built to go that way naturally; maybe it was because he had set himself a task to do. The point is he stuck to his knitting, put his heart and mind on his work, and walked the straight, white chalk-mark without a sign of wavering. That's the road to success. And Tug McCarthy licked my six picked men, one after the other.

The last of the half-dozen went into the discard in Tacoma, and a week later I walked in on Sam Waters in his Wall Street office. He was all wrapped up in a ticker, and for ten minutes let the tape run through his plump fingers without a word to me. Then he turned and, not cracking a smile, said quietly, "If I was as poor a speculator as you are a fight manager I'd have been in the poorhouse long ago."

No man likes that talk, least of all when he's spent half a lifetime building up a name and reputation. Would Sam Waters like me to tell him he was a boob in Wall Street? I drew one quick breath, and came right back at him. "If you had one man against you in Wall Street half as good as your son," I said, "you'd be begging pennies on the corner."

But he never turned a hair. "If you can't lick him, I'll find somebody else that can," he replied.

I looked at him fiercely for a second, then walked to the door. Holding the handle, I glowered back at him. "I came on here to

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sign up a man that is a real mit slinger, and only dropped in thinking to be civil. When you meet that son of yours again you'll need a broom to sweep up the pieces."

"Good!" he shouted after me as I banged the door.

I found Madigan in his feed store which he ran in connection with his livery-stable. "Where do you keep that untamable wildcat of yours?" I asked him after the greetings were disposed of.

The Jersey Whirlwind, christened Len Fein, was going through his motions in the sun-dried ring in the middle of the big yard. I had his record in my inside pocket, sent on to me in Tacoma by this same man, Madigan. It was fair to middling at the start and growing better at the end. He'd won the last eight by clean knockouts or the judge's say-so. The week before, down in Wilmington, he'd stacked up against the stiffest battler of the lot and had flattened him in the seventh stanza. Watching him perform, I now saw he had all the correct earmarks and that there was nothing wrong with his size and build. He stood six-foot-three of bone and muscle, and he carried the bulk of it in the right place—high above the belt. My mind was already settled. I said a few words to him, and he fell for more tin than he'd ever thought was in the land.

That evening the Whirlwind and I left for Los Angeles. Tug had got my message and was waiting there. They wanted the mill out at the Vernon arena, and in five minutes we were all signed up for twenty rounds.

HAVE you ever been harried in your insides? If not, I hope you never will; for it's a sad and worrysome experience. Who could have told me before that there was a heart in me? I'd been thinking this long time it was nothing more than a round stone. I'd have freely given my right hand, my right eye that night to be in Tug's corner instead of behind the Jersey Whirlwind.

There I was, coming out victor in the greatest battle of my life, and not a sign or glow of elation in me; only sorrow and remorse weighing me down—I was responsible for sending that college boy to defeat. I'll never forget it to my dying day; no, nevermore.

He stuck it out seventeen rounds—seventeen most terrible rounds. The Whirlwind had weight and height and reach on him; he got in a lucky stab right at the start; but Tug stood up to his beating with a heart of gold. I'd been against him in a long row of scraps, covering nearly two years, and I'd been liking him better and better all the time; for one couldn't help it, you see. He'd never crowed; he'd never done anything but fight and play the game—and here I was with the guilt on me of laying him low.

You couldn't make that lad strike his colors; he was one of those tow-head Norsemen who is carried home on his shield. The last three rounds his hands were down and he was reeling all around—he never heard me begging him, nor the crowd hollering, nor the referee imploring him. But at last it finished, as it must—a right swing met him squarely. He fell full length in the rosin, and then rolled over, his face just below the ropes less than a foot away, looking straight at me.

"You're a good, game boy, Tug," I said, not thinking of anything else.

"But he never answered one word, only strove to rise. But not a nerve in him responded to his will. His iron jaw—just like his dad's—went shut fast, and his eyes met mine, straight and fearless, defiant even in that moment of defeat.

I was heart-sick. I left the Jersey Whirlwind to look after himself and came back into town alone.

Then the practical side of me began asserting itself, as it always will. That young fellow, at the very worst, had only met what many another had met. Unlike the rest of them, he had a soft nest to go to after his defeat. And word of the knockout would come as welcome news to old Sam Waters, waiting for his son to join him in the battle royal in Wall Street. There was also the healthy bonus coming to me in payment for a stiff contract well done. I turned into the telegraph office and shoots this along the wire to Flinty Sam:

"You don't have to hire anybody else for the job. I turned the trick in the seventeenth this night, and I'll thank you for the bonus. Maybe the honey bee in his bonnet is dead, and maybe it isn't."

Then I mosied over to the hotel, ready to sleep easy after a profitable day's work. But there was a young man waiting in the lobby and he said that he'd come to take me to a good friend of mine. I suspected it was some of the boys getting up a midnight frolic, and so got into the car. My strange escort headed like mad down to the railroad, and before I knew it we were drawn up beside a big private car. As I mounted the steps and walked in, who did I see there but Sam Waters. He was pondering in an armchair away down at the end, but the moment he spied me he came charging as if he was going to eat me alive.

"Damn you, Breslin!" he shouted. "You're not going to get away with it! No, you're not!"

You could have knocked me over with a feather. What was he driving at? He dug into his pocket and handed over a check all made out for the bonus.

"I never thought you'd earn it," he said. "It's like paying you blood-money. But I live up to my word in this and everything else. But I'm with my boy, I'd have you know, even if I don't——"

Then he burst loose, and it all comes out. He'd only been on the level with me in that Seabright affair; then, he honestly thought that would cure the boy. But after the medicine failed to work, after Tug McCarthy was born, with his square, iron jaw— Oh, if you'd heard him chatter!

"You lick a son of mine?" he raved. "There isn't a man living can do it! Do you hear that?"

I certainly heard it, and a lot more. The son had won the father over. It was pride that did it, I reckon—the pride of a man in a good, stout-hearted son who was his very own. Oh, I knew Sam Waters's feelings.

The old man had seen every fight his son had after that Cripple Creek shindig. He'd been in Portland even. He'd come slipping into town in his private car for each mill, and hang on a siding only long enough to lose himself in the crowd and watch his son perform. He'd been in the Vernon arena this very night.

"I never liked my son going into the ring," he went on, "but when he got in it anyway, I'm for him strong. I hired you because of that—to bring him along. No one ever will be a tip-topper in this world matching wits against third-raters. I put you across his path to give him the keen competition that success feeds on. You think you've done your work well, but, Breslin, there's no man he can't whip."

"In view of what's just taken place—" I started, but he cut me off short.

"I know a fighter!" he said, and ran to his desk where he got a picture of a well set-up youngster in ring costume, mits on his hands and all. "Do you know who that is?" he thunders.

"Not a bit of me can guess," I replied.

"That's me!" he said, his chest swelling as I looked at him in blank wonder. "My boy doesn't know it; but I trimmed all the amateurs in the State of Pennsylvania to a fare-thee-well before he was born."

I began to see a streak of daylight—and then there was a racket behind me. Both of us looked around as Tug McCarthy appeared on the scene. His face showed a fine assortment of adhesive, but he was getting along without the aid of the two handlers by his side. He halted as if shot, at sight of his dad, and moved to back away. But his old man went straight up to him and gripped him by the hand.

"I sent for you," he said. "You're bunged up a trifle. I like you better in defeat than in victory." Then he laid his hand on the boy's shoulder. "There never was a Waters rested under a stain on his banner. We're going after the Jersey Whirlwind, aren't we, son?"

"I've been up to the hotel chasing Breslin for a return match," says Tug.

"We'll fix the match right here!" announced Sam Waters, and turned to me.

"Hold on," I said, sparring for a breathing spell. "What am I up against? Are you his manager?"

"Yes, I am," answered Flinty Waters quickly.

"How about you, Tug?" I inquired.

"Dad and I are of the same mind," says Tug, smooth as could be.

I sparred again. You see, I was in position to make demands of Jeff. This was no mean victory. Tug McCarthy had become well known in the West; you'd find paragraphs about him in the sport pages back East, and his pictures in the pink London sheets. Why should I be risking what I'd just won? Bigger game was the meat I was after. If I couldn't get Jeff just yet, I could, at least, get a crack at Fitz or Sailorman Sharkey. And seeing we were on the subject of gates and purses, I was all business once more. But old Sam Waters settled it in a hurry.

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"I'll put up the whole amount," he said, "and you can name your own figure."

It was too tempting to pass up. I signed right there, scrawling my name after the bold handwriting of Sam Waters. Then in a couple of days I got a wire saying that he'd fixed it all complete with Jimmy Croffoth for Mechanic's Pavilion in 'Frisco, and that it was to be twenty rounds again.

The Whirlwind was tickled half to death with the prospect. He looked on Tug as easy picking. He knew the one hardest thing for a glove man to do is a comeback. Besides, he was dead sure he had it on Tug at every angle of the game. But, all the same, I took him out early near Santa Clara and drove him hard at training every day. Tug had taken over Jeff's old camp at Harbin Springs, which was familiar ground to him. It was there he had come by the skill to bomb and scuttle Battleship Burke.

There was some excitement in the days when that mill was drawing near. Every one knew now who Tug McCarthy was. There had been reports, quite naturally, but now they were all confirmed by Samuel Waters himself. And how the newspapers did eat that stuff up! The King of Wall Street encouraging his son to be the King of the Ring! Not that alone, but actually managing him!

The whole broad land was gone plumb crazy over it. And why not? Sam Waters and Tim Breslin in the same boat! And the way Flinty Waters handled himself! What he said in the daily prints to them goody-goodies was a shame—to the softies, sticking up their finicky noses, and wanting to have us believe it's time enough to breed a fighting race when the enemy has set your house afire!

I'd never liked old Sam Waters, but I was beginning to like him now. He was no hypocrite, buying ringside seats. Instead of that, he was taking the world as he found it, and helping it along by playing a man's part in a man's way.

All Frisco was in or about the historic pavilion that night. We were in our corner first, and the Jersey Whirlwind got a liberal hand. But it was as nothing to the noise and roar that greeted Tug McCarthy and his dad. The first sight I got of them it struck me hard that I was up against not one, but two of these set jaws. Yes, they were fixed as if nailed and welded together. And the old boy went about his business in his corner as if it was nothing more to him than juggling millions in Wall Street with both hands. He was just the same as he was that morning when I found him standing by the ticker, running the tape through his fingers and paying no heed to me or the rest of the world.

There's another big surprise for me when Tug strips off. I'd heard that his dad had run both Fitz and Kid McCoy into Harbin, bringing them across from New York in his private car; so I was expecting to find the boy in dandy shape. He was all that, and then some.

Talk about your pictures and your scenery and your artists big and small! But what sight more soothing and inspiring, more beautiful, than the human form? And what human shape, I ask you, can match or come near that of the tall, grown, young gloveman, trained for speed and staying qualities, trim and fine, sleek as silk in every little line? That's one of the satisfying things, I own up, that keeps ever luring me to the ringside.

And as I've often told you, I've looked on them all. I can shut my eyes this minute and see the grand and noble proportions of John L. in his prime; I can call them all back up and down the line, but the decision goes to Tug McCarthy as he was that night. Small wonder his father was daffy about him. I'd lie down and die this minute in content if I had such a boy. He'd filled out something magnificent. He was perfection for the eye to behold.

When he dropped the bathrobe from his wide shoulders and stood there at ease, not a muscle showed; but when he walked to the middle, as if not touching the ground, I saw those long, pliant cords play sweetly under his bronzed skin. Greeks and Dagoes and Turks—you can have them all! For myself, just give me Tug McCarthy in his splendid manhood there that night!

I tipped off the Whirlwind that he had his work cut out for him. But no use. His peanut was miles away in Los Angeles, dwelling on another Tug McCarthy prone on the floor. That's a mistake not peculiar to the ring. You and I can name lots of men that thought one victory enough to last them their lifetime; and when they woke up the count was all done.

It was that way with the Jersey Whirlwind. He went in over-confident; his head was so swelled that Tug couldn't miss it. He forgot all about having copped Tug with a damaging swing early in their first encounter, and that the ill effects had stuck to the end. But no matter—Tug that night was too good for him the best day he ever saw. And when the tide of battle set against him, when the pinch came, the Whirlwind blew as soft as a June breeze.

No sooner had they squared off, than Tug dropped him with a short-arm drive clean through his guard. He repeated in the third, and twice in the fourth the Whirlwind kissed the canvas. It's no pleasure to me to see a man taking a lambasting, and I turned aside to see what old Sam Waters was doing.

There he is, calm and cold as a fish baked in a cake of ice. It's all clear about him. This is just another deal in Wall Street for Sam; he's been meeting men in bloody combat ever since the days when he treated all the amateurs in the State of Penn to a fare-thee-well.

The knockout came in the sixth. Tug, his hair not mussed, worked him into a corner, and—bingo—it's all over! There wasn't no need for any count. I helped lift the Whirlwind up on his stool, and when I was busy bringing him back to knowledge of his own shortcomings, I felt a tap on my shoulder and looked around. It was Flinty Waters, and I thought he was going to spoil everything by an ill-fitting word. But no.

"Come over to the hotel without delay," he said. "I want to talk with you."

"When I rid this third-rater of his terrible nightmare, I'll join you, Mr. Waters," I replied, and resumed with the smelling-salts.

THE old boy was wasting no time. His grips were being carried out when I showed in the door. "You're not leaving us, I hope?" I said.

"Come in here, Breslin," he rejoined, leading the way into a sitting-room and shutting the door. "The work you did for me some time ago was first-class, and——"

"Oh, it was, was it?" I cut in, sarcastic.

"Forget all that," he allowed. "You did right well, and I want to tie up with you again."

"From what befell my Whirlwind it looks as if I'm needing a job," I observed.

He faced me all of a sudden, as if ready to start something. "What do you think of my son as a fighter?"

"He's a cuckoo and a daisy and a lallapaloosa," I solemnly affirmed.

"How far will he go?"

"He'll lick Jeff with one hand tied behind him."

"I'm glad you agree with me," he said, nodding. Then he perks up for business. "Look here now, Breslin. It's no use talking to that boy about giving up the fight game. I made a fizzle of trying to wish a wife on him; I fizzled that Seabright affair—I've fizzled it every time I've tried to do his thinking for him. That's what comes of having a son with a will of his own. It's tough and hard on a father, who thinks he's wiser. But, Breslin, I always did like a man that stands in his own two shoes. No matter what else, this is my son's lookout. He wants it that way, and so let it be. He just loves mixing it in the middle of the ring—he's got it in his blood I suppose."

Flinty Sam paused, and the proud smile wrinkling his eyes reminded me of a photograph of a Pennsylvania amateur. He continued:

"This victory to-night will make him keener than ever. Now that he's in the game it's up to us both to help him all we can. I should like to go on doing it myself, but, Breslin, this glove business is small potatoes, nothing more than a snap of your fingers. It's too tame for me. I'm going back to Wall Street where there's real fighting. Will you manage my son for me?"

"Putting aside the fact you're handing me a champion, Mr. Waters, I'd manage him if he was the rankest dub."

Those were my words. And, thinking back, I can't say I didn't mean them. There was something or other about Tug McCarthy that won you without your knowing. And I was fast beginning to realize that some of the same stuff was present in the make-up of his dad. Aye, old Flinty Waters, when you got to know him, under his pelt, was a right good sort.

We agreed on it then and there, only leaving it to the boy for the final say. "He's getting here late," Sam remarked, taking out his watch; and just then Tug walked in, chipper as could be. We laid the plan before him and he listened quietly without one word till we both were done.

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"There's only one man in the world I'd let manage me other than yourself, dad, and that's Tim Breslin," he said, looking over at me. "We've had some good scraps, haven't we, Tim? But of the whole lot I enjoyed none half so much as the sinking of Battleship Burke."

"That old man of the sea! Let his poor bones lie!" I rejoined. "I'm going to camp on Jeff's trail right away, Tug; and after we take the title we'll tour the world."

"I can knock him out in ten rounds," said Tug.

"Now you're talking, son," chimed in Sam Waters.

"But there's one thing first," Tug added, with his queer smile. "Will you come with me, please, without asking questions, for a short ride?"

In a half-hour or so the car stopped in front of a neat house, with a lawn in front and vines on the porch. There was a light in every window and figures flitting about in every room. And when we rang the bell, who should come running to throw wide the door and welcome us, but Mrs. Tug McCarthy.

Oh, yes! There had been a knot-tying party in the short time since the fight was won. And now there was a mighty fussing going on, getting ready for the honeymoon.

"What has kept you so long?" she asked sweetly of Tug; though it was plain he had wasted not one second going and coming back with us pair of blundering old fools.

I certainly thought Flinty Sam would break down and cry. His lips were quivering, and his Adam's apple was like a monkey on a string. His son had always been surprising him—this was the biggest surprise of all.

She was a sweet and winsome girl; and Sam Waters himself could see that, even if she was the final proof of all his well-laid schemes gone wrong. I almost laughed when I thought of him having tried to pick a ball and chain for Tug. But now that he was up against it, he treated her as a father should—no matter what you say about him, Sam Waters was a good sport. Clasping her hands and looking into her eyes of blue, he said:

"You're just the girl I have always wanted my son to wed."

Tug stood at one side, enjoying the muffs we both were making, but at last he pipes in:

"Mr. Breslin is my new manager, dear, and is to match me with Jeff first thing."

Like a flash the girl turned and flung this right at my head: "You'll never manage him; he's given his promise to me." Then she lets go this one at Flinty Sam: "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mr. Waters, for wanting your son in the ring."

Ho, ho! That was landing it fair and square on dad.

THE great manager paused, then leaned forward with his gaze fixed far down the dusty highway.

"Look at Andy Moakley coming home there with his free, easy stride. A grand, good-looking boy; calling back to my old eyes the fond and lost sight of Tug McCarthy." He sat up and looked at me. "Isn't it passing strange that I should have such warmth in my heart for one that I never managed, but who was always pitted against me, in the opposing corner of the ring?"

"Not so very strange, Tim," I quietly replied.

"It was his fighting spirit, I suppose," allowed Tim Breslin.

"You never got the match with Jeff?"

"With the girl he loved standing in the way? Not much! What Flinty Sam Waters, with all his power and success, couldn't do, that slip of a girl done without even trying.

"Sam Waters sent them honeymooning in his private car. There was a crowd of the girl's friends down to see them off. Old Flinty hooked his arm in mine and pulled me to one side out of the jam; and we stood there alone, under the arc lights, watching the train pull out, with Tug and his bride waving from the rear platform. For a long time there wasn't a word between us, then I could stand it no more.

" 'There goes my world's champion, fading from view,' I breathed. 'Isn't it odd that I should be feeling glad?'

"Then Flinty Sam turned and leveled his eyes at me.

" 'You and I can plan,' he said, 'and the Tug McCarthys may all fight their heads off; but it's always a know-nothing girl gives the decision.' "

"Mama's Boy," another story by Mr. Bullock, will appear in September EVERYBODY'S.

Spanish Love

A Drama of a Land of Jealousies and Loves and Hates—A Land that is called the Garden of Passions

By Mary Roberts Rinehart and Avery Hopwood

Published by courtesy of the authors and the producers, Wagenhals and Kemper

IN SOUTHEASTERN Spain lies Murcia, the land of simple faith and simple people. Once an arid wilderness, it has been turned, through artificial irrigation, into a province so rich that, as the Spanish saying has it, "Drive a cane into the soil of the Huerta and the day after it will bear blossoms." It is a land of jealousies and loves and hates, and it is called the Garden of Passions. Men fight for what they want, and in such a struggle for the heart of a girl Maria, Pencho has so wounded young Javier, the only son of rich Domingo Maticas, that the scar will not heal and helps to aggravate the cough which wracks his weakened body.

Pencho is a fugitive from justice and there are those he has left behind him who believe him guilty of attempted murder, while there are others who are loyal to him and who believe he will return to assert his innocence and claim his girl, Maria del Carmen. In the heart of Javier there is hate for Pencho and love for Maria, and the girl, fearful lest Javier die of his wound and Pencho really be regarded as a murderer, has spent many days nursing the boy back to health and, by her presence, inflaming his passion for her. It is here that the play, "Spanish Love," begins, in the little square in front of the hermitage.

ANDREAS: Pencho! Pencho the fearless has run away!

ANTON (*pompously*): And as long as I'm Alcalde he'll never come back! The brave Pencho—the fighting Pencho has turned tail, like a frightened dog, and now he's gnawing a bone across the sea in Oran!

ROQUE (*angrily*): When he comes back—showing his teeth——

ANTON: I'm the dentist who'll pull them!

ROQUE (*hotly*): He knew what to expect from you, Señor Alcalde! You got your office through Domingo Maticas—and you made the quarrel of Javier your own! And so, when Pencho was accused—

VICENTI (*interrupting wrathfully*): And *justly* accused! If any of you fellows on your side of the canal know how to write, send a line to your friend, Pencho, and advise him to keep away! They didn't go on with his trial, because important witnesses refused to testify. But it was Pencho who stabbed Maticas's son, and left him on the ground to die! And Maticas won't forget, nor forgive!

ROQUE: But the boy is still living.

ANTON: And you call that living? You've seen him, haven't you? You know what he used to be and what he is now—a poor, broken creature.

Enter PEPUSO, *wearing the old-fashioned costume of the Huerta as a sign that he believes the world becoming effeminate in its new ways; he has been used to blood in the veins rather than milk and he is a friend to* PENCHO.

PEPUSO: That boy has red blood in him! He'll come when he hears that his sweetheart Maria del Carmen and Javier—(*He stops.*)

ROQUE (*fiercely*): You lie!

PEPUSO: I haven't said it yet, but it's true!

ROQUE: No! I tell you she doesn't *care* for Javier! Maria del Carmen has never forgotten Pencho! I've seen her turn white just hearing his name!

PEPUSO: Because she knows what he'll do if he comes back and finds out that for ten months she's sat at Javier's bedside—nursing him.

ROQUE: To cure Javier of his wound. If Vavier died Pencho would be a murderer in the eyes of the law. It was a fair fight, but the law won't recognize that.

PEPUSO (*sourly*): As for Maria del Carmen, Domingo Maticas is rich and Javier is his only son, and the girl has sold herself so that she can be the grand Señora of the Huerta. She'll marry the sickly wretch and be barren all her days——

ROQUE: If she has sold herself it's to save Pencho——

PEPUSO: I'd rather go to hell with Pencho than to Paradise with some I know. I hope he does come back. Let him find her married. Then we'll see the Huerta awake again! Then we'll see blood flow! That's something to live for.

IN THE meantime, *Maria del Carmen* is on the road begging alms for a mass for *Javier's* recovery. She is gossiped about to such an extent that money is slow to come her way; add to which her parents, poor and grasping peasants, want her to marry a rich man's son. She comes upon the arguing crowd, tired and nervous—intent that *Javier* must live. *Pepuso* will give no money for the recovery of a man who would be no great loss. He has written to *Pencho* to return and the boy is on his way. When *Maria del Carmen* hears this, she is panic-stricken; she wants to hear all about him, but she wants him to stay away. *Pepuso* calls her a jilt; he tells her that *Pencho* knows that she has given him up.

MARIA: But, Pepuso, it isn't true, what you are saying—it isn't true! I haven't given Pencho up—I haven't stopped loving him—no one could make me do that! I love him as I love the light by which I see—as I love the air which is the breath of my life. Pepuso, I was doing it all for Pencho's sake! For I carry his image, not where we wear the blessed scapular, but deeper still—in my heart! I thought that if I took care of Javier and was kind to him, I'd gain some influence with his people and, once he was cured, the case against Pencho wouldn't be reopened. My lips are worn out with prayers—and my hands are weary. I've raised them so often, begging Heaven to be merciful—to my Pencho and to me!

This outburst convinces *Pepuso* that he is wrong, but he sees that the girl will have a hard time unless she tells every one of her true love, since *Javier* has himself come to care for her. If she does this, he will keep *Pencho* away and out of danger. So, with her permission, he tells the folk who are near the true state of affairs and the parents of *Maria del Carmen* are in a passion of rage. At this moment there arrive *Javier* and his father—the poor boy irritable, burning with fever, passionate with love for *Maria*. The father would go to any extreme for this only son of his—try all the doctors of fame, humor his every whim, even use every means to convict *Pencho* to get him out of the way of *Maria*.

MARIA (*going to Javier, who is looking sadly at her*): You are not so warm now. Shall I get some water?

JAVIER: No. Don't leave me. (*He holds out his hand and she takes it. They listen to the music of the mass near by.*) Perhaps Paradise will be like this. Music coming from somewhere and a hand that you love holding yours. (*He closes his eyes.*)

MARIA (*constrainedly*): You're better, Javier—you're *so* much better! Why, you're almost well!

JAVIER (*opening his eyes*): I'm not, Maria del Carmen. And you know why! It's because I love you and you don't care! *Don't* you love me—just a little! Can't you love me? *Please* love me! Look at me! I dragged myself from my bed—I've staggered, hot and thirsty, along the dusty road—praying for breath to carry me along—just so I could see you.

MARIA: Javier—have pity on me!

JAVIER: What have you had on me? You've made me your slave, set my brain and heart on fire. You could make me happy—and that would make me well again! If you'd only be my wife—oh, you'd see. You and I—in our little white cottage—just you and I—and all the world shut out! I'd hold you in my arms—(*cough*) and when I felt you there so soft and warm—it would melt away—this awful, icy thing in my chest, that stabs me when I draw a breath. The pain would go and love would take its place. Why do you ask *me* to pity you! What have I done? Is all this my fault? Why did you come to take care of me? When I came out of my delirium, why were you there beside me? Why did you *stay* beside me—so good to me, so tender! You'd have done better to have let me die from the wound your Pencho gave me. (*Sinks on a seat.*)

MARIA: I hoped that you'd be grateful to me and that some day you'd say: "Maria del Carmen, tell Pencho to come back! He has nothing to fear from me—I forgive him!" *Now* you understand, don't you? What I wanted was to win your forgiveness—to make peace between you and Pencho—to try to bring a little sunshine back to this sky of ours that's been all blackened over with hate!

JAVIER: How afraid you are for *that* man! How you try to protect him! I don't forgive him! I don't!

MARIA: Then, why don't you come out in the open and accuse him!

JAVIER: Accuse him? No! When they were investigating the crime, I refused to speak—and I *still* refuse! Don't be afraid, I won't turn him over to the authorities. I'm saving him for myself! Don't you understand! *That* revenge belongs to me. Two things in a man are stronger than his body and stronger than the call of death. One is love and one is hate! Two things have drawn me back to life—to have you and to *kill* him!

Thus there is an irreconcilable gap between the two and *Domingo*, the father, knows it and sees it. He knows that love is killing his son, as well as *Pencho's* wound, and he determines to use every means to win *Maria del Carmen.*

DOMINGO: I'm no doctor, but I *am* a father—and to be the father of a child one loves teaches a man a great deal. Don Fulgencio, the physician, is right. My son's chief disease is his infatuation for you.

MARIA: I do not love *him.*

DOMINGO (*with the hint of a threat in his voice*): My child, I have not come here to beg of you or to drag after you on my knees, the way my poor boy does. (*After a moment's thought.*) How much do you love Pencho?

MARIA: I would be nailed to the cross for his sake.

DOMINGO: Then you'd make a sacrifice to save him?

MARIA (*eagerly*): Oh, anything!

Then he tells *Maria del Carmen* that he has proof of the fact that *Pencho* stabbed his son—his dagger from which a piece of the metal work was missing.

MARIA (*breathlessly*): And that piece.

DOMINGO: The police found it on the ground where Javier had fallen. So I think you can understand that the day when I go and throw that dagger down on the table before a judge, your Pencho will be condemned. If my son can not live, then I shall bring Pencho to justice.

MARIA: If you've made up your mind, why have you told me this?

DOMINGO: Because I feel—because I *know*—that Javier has a chance for life if you will marry him.

MARIA: And if I don't—you'll denounce Pencho!

DOMINGO: As God is my witness.

At this crucial moment, *Maria del Carmen* hears that *Pencho* has come to the Huerta; it is too late to be warned by *Pepuso.*

ANTON: Shall I arrest him?

MARIA: Oh God!

DOMINGO: One moment. (*He turns toward* MARIA DEL CARMEN, *takes her by the hand and leads her aside.*) What shall we do with him?

MARIA (*although terrified, overcomes her emotion, dries her tears, raises her head and answers resolutely*): Let him go free in the Huerta—free and safe.

DOMINGO: That is your decision?

MARIA: Yes.

DOMINGO: You'll marry Javier?

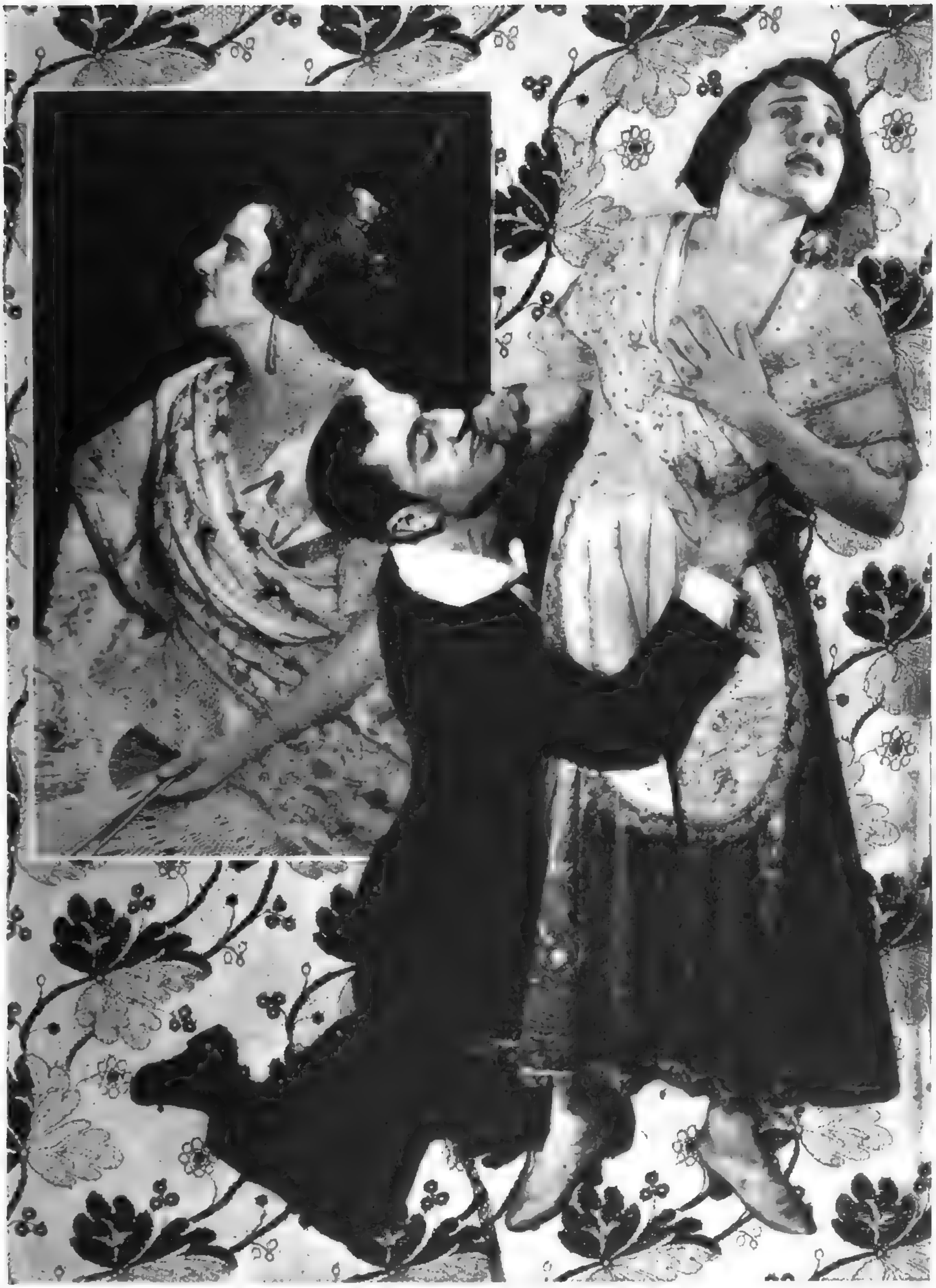
MARIA: Yes.

IT IS thus that, just at the moment *Pencho* comes, proud and angry, upon the scene, he watches a gay crowd following *Maria del Carmen* and *Javier* to celebrate their public betrothal.

Thus far the two, *Maria del Carmen* and *Pencho*, have not met face to face. That is to happen at *Domingo's* house, amidst the scenes of excitement attendant on the settlement of the marriage dowry. Gay the surroundings, but heavy the heart of *Maria*, who is living up to her bargain with *Javier's* father. For a moment she finds herself alone, when *Pencho* enters.

Pencho (right), who is played by James Rennie, returns to find that *Maria* (Maria Ascarra) is engaged to *Javier* (William H. Powell). *Pencho,* speaking: "So—you think she belongs to you, because you've made a prisoner of her. Open the cage and watch where the bird will fly."
Javier—"Stop, damn you, or I'll tear your tongue out."

At the top left is a portrait study of Maria Ascarra, leading woman in "Spanish Love." At top right is Ione Bright who plays *Fuensantica.*



Javier (speaking to *Maria*): "You've made me your slave, set my brain and heart on fire. You could make me happy—and that would make me well again—if you'd only be my wife."

At the top left is Señora Caritos, one of the dancers in "Spanish Love."

Pencho: Maria del Carmen!

Maria (*slowly rising, stares at him*): Pencho! (*She instinctively takes a step toward him, then stops. Her tone changes.*) So you have come back, Pencho?

Pencho: Yes. Oh, Maria del Carmen—what they've been telling me! Is it possible you've left me for another man? (*Maria does not reply.*) Tell me—what's happened?

Maria: You know. Pepuso wrote you.

Pencho: Yes; but when I read what he wrote, I tore his letter up and trampled it into the ground! I said, "It isn't true!"

Maria (*quickly*): No—it *wasn't* true—*then!*

Pencho: I said to myself: "Something's going on near my home," and I came back to find out what it was! The moment I got here, all the gossips in the place began to tell me the same thing that I'd read in that letter and I said again, "It isn't true!" Then I saw *you*—I *saw* you, Maria del Carmen—in front of the church! You were running away as I came toward you and you were with the man that they said had stolen you from me! And still I said to myself, "I don't believe it! What they've told me is a lie! What I *see* is a lie! The sunlight that shows it to me is lying, too!" What's happened? What's made you hate me?

Maria (*with a cry, after a pause throws her arms around him*): *Hate* you! Oh no, Pencho, no!

Pencho: You are in my heart as you are in my arms. (*Kisses her eyes.*) I kiss your sweet eyes. (*He holds her close.*) I have you now. I'll never let you go. (*Maria frees herself.*)

In this moment of bitter happiness, *Pencho* discovers the great sacrifice *Maria del Carmen* is making for his safety; but he will have none of it. He will face them with their infamy. He has not long to wait. *Javier* comes before him.

Javier (*to Pencho*): Why have you come here?

Pencho: To take her away from you.

Maria: Oh, don't! (*To Pencho.*) Please go!

Javier (*catching* Maria's *hand, but his eyes never leaving* Pencho's): I warn you, let her alone. Don't speak to her! Don't look at her. From now on she doesn't even exist for you! She's mine!

Pencho (*throws hat down*): You lie!

Javier: Oh! (*With a cry of rage he is about to draw his knife and throw himself on* Pencho, *but suddenly he staggers slightly.*)

Maria: Javier! (*She runs to him and holds him back.*)

Javier (*pushing her aside*): No! Let me alone! (*Pulling himself up and making an effort to appear strong and composed.*) She belongs to me! (*To* Maria.) You tell him. Let him hear you say it! Tell him he's the one that lies.

Pencho: Don't say anything, Maria del Carmen! (*Advancing to* Javier, *as* Javier *advances to him.*) What you make her say don't mean anything. You've frightened her so that she——

Maria (*gasping*): Oh yes—you frighten me, both of you!

Pencho: So—you think she belongs to you, because you've made a prisoner of her? Open the cage and watch where the bird will fly. She loves *me!* It was I who taught her love! I sang her the love songs that she hums beneath her breath. I trimmed my guitar with love-knots that she made for me. I wore the love-flowers that I had plucked from her balcony. I wore them on my heart, and every night I stood outside the grill work of her window and held her hand in mine—and drank her breath!

Javier (*maddened with anger and jealousy*): Stop! Damn you—stop!

Pencho: And I carry here (*striking his chest*) the Virgin of Carmel—embroidered for me—covered with her kisses—and marked with the tears she shed—for me!

Javier (*desperate*): Stop, damn you, or I'll tear out your tongue!

Pencho: Come and try it!

Javier: You— (*He is about to rush at* Pencho, *but sways and lets himself sink into a chair, panting and glaring with eyes full of hatred.*)

After his weakness subsides, *Javier* continues:

You've come back to interfere between her and me! I'm glad you *did* come back! You've saved me the trouble (*He pants.*) of looking for you!

Pencho (*incredulously*): *You* were going to look for me!

Javier: Yes—to kill you!

Pencho: Very well! I'm here!

Javier: You wrote your own death

sentence—here—in my flesh! (*Striking his breast.*) You bungled your work! But I shall not! I shall strike true! (*Crouching, hand on dagger.*)

PENCHO (*insolently*): And—when?

JAVIER: Now!

But they are both stopped in time, *Pepuso* arriving to take *Pencho* to see his father, *Maria* to revive *Javier.* Then dancers and admiring peasants surround the couple, and *Domingo* tells of the marriage settlement which has pleased the avaricious demands of *Maria del Carmen's* parents. It is galling to *Javier* that he can neither dance nor drink like the others, but to *Maria* there is nothing about the festivities and betrothal ceremony but her soul's crucifixion.

MARIA: You remember what you promised me?

DOMINGO: What I promised you?

MARIA: What—what you have hidden in the house—the dagger.

DOMINGO: Oh! yes, of course.

MARIA: Will you give it to me now?

DOMINGO (*gently*): I shall be waiting for you here the day you return from the church after the marriage.

MARIA: Don't you trust me!

DOMINGO: I do. But still I think it is best to wait.

MARIA: Then have the marriage as soon as possible!

THE festivities are at their height when *Pencho* again enters, this time intent on telling the crowd what a sacrifice *Maria del Carmen* is being forced to make. "She's selling herself—" he declares, "her life's happiness to save a man from arrest and punishment." But he will not have such a price paid for him; he is the man the police are looking for, and as evidence of this fact, he tells of the knife he used and which he says *Domingo* now has. When the Alcalde proves this to be so, then *Pencho* turns to *Maria del Carmen:*

You're free from your oath. Good-by!

MARIA (*coming out of her dazed condition*): Where are you going? Pencho—where are they taking you?

JAVIER: Maria del Carmen! (*Trying to take her hand.*)

MARIA (*snatching her hand away from him*): No, no! Pencho is right. I am free now. I belong to him! I'll never leave him again. Pencho—take me away. Take me away!

But the law finds it difficult to take *Pencho* without armed force, for there are friends around who would not hesitate to give battle. So the Alcalde leaves the prisoner in *Domingo's* house while he goes off for aid. Best for him to escape, in order to hold *Maria* to her promise, so argues *Domingo,* but his son is of a different mind. "You are afraid," says *Javier,* when he hears that *Pencho* will await the return of the Alcalde, "you would rather be behind bars than face me."

PENCHO: This is how much I am afraid. Hide me somewhere here and then we'll settle this between us.

JAVIER: Yes! I'll hide you. To-night you and I——

PENCHO: You and I when you please. (JAVIER *opens a door.*)

JAVIER: Go in.

DOMINGO: Yes, go in.

MARIA: Don't give him up to them.

DOMINGO: It's all right. We'll save him. We'll save him.

JAVIER (*closing the door and locking it, panting triumphant to* DOMINGO): No—you won't save him. I've got him now! And to-night I'll kill him! (MARIA *screams and* JAVIER *falls into* DOMINGO'S *arms.*)

Maria del Carmen, with a maid in the house of *Domingo,* has planned the escape of *Pencho* and the two go to the room to tell him of the way. Yet he will not stir, he will not break his word with *Javier. Maria* tells him of her love and that moves him; she pictures their life together and that tempts him; but *Pencho* is *Pencho* and he will wait the coming of *Javier,* who now enters, cheered and strengthened by the report of the doctor that there is not much the matter with him after all.

JAVIER (*maddened*): You think I'm sick and weak? Is that it? That I'm no match for you? Well, the doctor has just told me there's nothing wrong with me. He's right. I feel new strength already in my veins. I am as strong as you are, Pencho Pascualo. (*They both make ready to go out.*)

MARIA: *I'm* the reason why you hate each other. *I'm* the one who must go away. Give me up, both of you, and don't fight! I'm the one you'll kill!

JAVIER: No—you must live—to belong to me!

They are about to go when *Domingo's* footsteps are heard approaching. He is happy—now is no time for animosity, when the doctor gives a clean bill of health for *Javier*. He has no enemies to-night. But though *Pencho* understands the father's joy, he must wait for the son and keep his word. So he exits to a near-by room, while *Domingo* and the doctor have another talk. Joy is short-lived to some—and on the father's heart there falls the weight of renewed anxiety. For the doctor has come to tell him that *Javier* is in a critical condition, with scarcely many hours to live.

DOCTOR FULGENCIO: Marriage is out of the question. Why, Domingo, you haven't the right to marry a healthy, vigorous, young woman to a dying man. Another thing, Domingo, get rid of this anger, this desire for revenge that is destroying him.

THE tragedy of this revelation is heard by *Javier*, who has entered unseen by the two men. He is tense as the doctor tells of his slim chances of life, he wavers and would fall but for the strong arm of *Pencho*, who catches him and carries him off. *Pencho* is grieved for the boy. He tries to tell the father so. "I am sorry, Domingo Maticas," he says, "that I have brought such grief upon your home." But *Domingo* is in no mood for listening. If *Pencho* takes *Maria del Carmen* with him, let it be quick, for *Domingo* is still intent on setting the law on his tracks. With *Javier* it is different now.

JAVIER: There is only a little life left in me. You heard what he said. Even if you hate me, you can do me one good turn. Kill me quickly——

PENCHO: I don't hate you, Javier.

JAVIER: You won't fight?

PENCHO: No. When I wounded you it was a clean fight. This would be murder.

JAVIER: Why don't you hate me? You have reason enough. (PENCHO *does not answer.* JAVIER *goes on as if thinking aloud.*) I see. We don't hate the dead, nor love them. We only remember them. (*Drops into a chair.*) Why don't you escape? They'll come and take you.

PENCHO (*stoically*): Let them!

JAVIER: If I die, you know what your punishment will be. Better kill me now and get away!

PENCHO: I won't raise my hand against a man who can't defend himself.

JAVIER (*rising and steadying himself by the chair*): I surrender, Pencho. You are a man! Go! I set you free of your promise. Go at once and save yourself.

PENCHO: Do you know what that means?

JAVIER: What?

PENCHO: If I go I shall not go alone.

JAVIER (*in protest*): No!

PENCHO: Either I'll take Maria del Carmen with me or I'll stay here.

JAVIER (*beseechingly*): You have everything—health, strength, life itself. Leave her to me.

PENCHO: Life! What is that to me without her?

So, in the midst of the coming of the Alcalde and his armed force, *Javier*, knowing that he has nothing with which to dispute the possession of *Maria del Carmen*, helps them to escape, gripping the hand of *Pencho* with a feeling that is no longer hate and saying good-by for the last time to *Maria*. Then, amidst the confusion of their going, *Javier* falls lifeless to the floor.

In the September EVERYBODY'S

The story of "The Green Goddess," the sensationally successful play by William Archer, will appear in the September number, out August 15

A Complete Novel

The God in Him

Intense, Red-blooded Drama Centering Around a Real Man and Two Tenderfeet. The Inexorable North Demands Payment From Those Who Break Its Laws

By Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton

Illustrations by E. J. Dinsmore

A SCORE of times in their years of roving Homer Bishop and Kenneth Poole had arranged a rendezvous, and neither had ever failed the other. It might have been the one known spot in a vast, uninhabited wilderness, or a lake or river which no white man had ever seen; yet when the time came both were there.

Because of this sense of certainty that he would find Kenneth on the last bay at the west end of Baker Lake—Kenneth and food and shelter—Homer was enabled to maintain a swift pace across the great, green, rolling plain in spite of hunger and weakness.

He had not eaten for two days. Because of storms and lack of shelter he had slept little for a week. He had been traveling on foot for a fortnight in a district never before penetrated by a white man, and had only his rough reckoning to rely upon in determining his position.

He was much farther from the northern limit of trees than from the Arctic Circle. The nearest home of white men was seven hundred difficult miles to the southeast. Yet the thought that Kenneth Poole was waiting for him on the desolate shore of Baker Lake invested his arrival with the prospective delight of a home-coming.

They had been separated for two weeks. The approach of the early winter of the barren grounds had compelled simultaneous journeys, one to the south and the other to the west, if they were to complete their investigation of the feasibility of establishing a reindeer ranch in the Chesterfield Inlet country. When they parted at the mouth of the Kazan River, it was agreed that Kenneth was to leave canoe, tent and supplies on the designated bay and that they were to meet there to begin their southward race against the winter.

At noon Homer climbed the gentle slope of a long roll in the plain and from its flat crest saw the west end of Baker Lake before him. Two hours later another slight rise showed the bay of the rendezvous directly ahead. His footsteps quickened, not so much from relief that his long journey would soon be ended as from a desire to be again with Kenneth.

Homer's memories of the years with Kenneth and of the years in the north country were so interwoven, so inextricably entwined, that one could never be complete without the other. They had found each other in the north, they had found the north through each other, and together they had passed unscarred through the harsh ordeals of the north. Now, though he believed that success in their project was assured, he fought off the thrill of triumph that it might be enhanced by Kenneth's participation.

When he had plodded across the last stretch of sandy, undulating prairie and topped the last rise, he stopped in complete bewilderment. The tent was not there. There was no mistake as to his having reached the spot agreed upon. The long sweep of shore-line, unbroken by bush or tree, barren as only the borders of northern lakes can be, lay before him. Nothing was hidden or could be hidden; and yet he could not believe but that some trick of vision screened the familiar triangle of canvas.

Panic began to displace bewilderment. A premonition of disaster clutched at his heart and he ran forward. A number of things might have explained Kenneth's delay in reaching the cache, but only tragedy could lie behind his failure to establish it.

As he ran he reviewed the details of their arrangement, seeking a possible cause for the absence of the tent that would give him hope. Yet the very rehearsal of the plans only made tragedy the more certain.

When they had parted at the mouth of the Kazan River, less than fifty miles of paddling lay before Kenneth, all of it along the south shore of Baker Lake. There had been bright sunshine and gentle breezes in those first few days, one of those rare times when the northland smiles and converts the barren grounds into a great plain of wonderful beauty. Kenneth, master canoeman, faced a journey as safe as the crossing of a mill pond, and yet he had never reached the rendezvous.

HOMER'S mind was still struggling with this appalling fact when he reached the shore of the bay. Stunned and helpless, he looked up and down the empty stretch, and then the sight of a figure huddled grotesquely against a low, flat boulder sent him lurching forward.

"Ken! Ken!"

The cry escaped his lips even as he knew the futility of it. With certainty gripping his heart, he still battled against the truth. He fell to his knees beside the unnaturally cramped body and grasped his friend's shoulder with a fierce insistence, as though grief and loneliness must call him back.

"Ken!" he repeated, pleadingly now. "Ken!"

Kenneth had never failed him in life and something in Homer insisted that he could not fail him even in death. But neither faith nor hope nor the force of a great love could instill a semblance of life in that wasted, stiffened body. Beaten and despairing, Homer accepted the inexorable fact and struggled to his feet.

His first thought was that something had happened to the equipment and that Kenneth had dragged himself to the rendezvous, keeping faith to the end. The drawn face and pitiably thin body told unmistakably of starvation. But as his gaze wandered over the boulder-strewn sand it was arrested by a small, clear square edged with stones, made familiar by many camp sites. It marked a spot where a tent had stood, their tent, erected as they so often had erected it together.

He leaped toward the place but its very emptiness added to the mystery. As he turned away a curious, curved line of little holes in the sand stopped him. Only one thing in the world forms it; water dripping from the gunwale of an overturned canoe. Leading away from them, down to the edge of the water, was a deep furrow made when the craft had been dragged to the lake.

Suddenly cool and alert, Homer walked back to Kenneth's body. He searched the pockets for a message; but there was none. Then he saw a knife that had been concealed by an outflung arm. The point of the blade was ground off and instantly Homer glanced up to the flat side of the low boulder.

Most evidently scratched with difficulty, displaying a pathetic economy of words and ending with marks almost illegible, was this message:

LEFT CACHE 2 DAYS OUT. TWISTED KNEE ROCKS FORDING LOST PACK RIFLE CRAWLED SIX DAYS CACHE GONE SO LONG HO——

Blinded by tears, Homer rose stiffly to his feet and stumbled away. His own position was as serious as that of the crippled man who had dragged himself through six heroic, terrible days. Soon he, too, might be huddled against a rock, carving his message with a knife-point. But in the face of the great emptiness which had come into his life, with his spirit numbed and crushed, he did not care.

He turned westward, looking over the desolate waste through which Kenneth had fought his torturous way, advancing by inches, creeping on day after day, sustained always by his faith in the inviolability of the cache.

In the bleak, tragic history of the north there is nothing finer than man's fidelity in the observance of this unwritten law. Red and white alike have bowed before it, recognizing in it a fundamental safeguard. Always the overburdened traveler has been able to deposit his vital possessions and go on, certain that he will find them upon his return. He must erect protection against the elements and match his cunning with that of the carcajou; but he never has had to give thought to violation by his own kind.

The very necessity for this inviolability has made the cache a sacred thing and has built a tradition around it. Starving men may take from it, enough to save life and to help them on their way. But to take all is to deprive another of life, is to commit murder by means so foul and so cowardly that Northmen draw back in horror at the thought.

Kenneth Poole and Homer Bishop had laughed at death in many places. No one knew better than they the inevitable terms their mistress, the Northland, imposes upon her subjects. They had accepted them and they had reveled in their danger, learning and loving one another better each time they battled side by side in the age-old fight of man against a harsh environment. Had death come to Kenneth fairly, had he gone down in a battle honorably fought, Homer could have borne it.

But Kenneth had triumphed over odds which should have won him life. He had been defeated, not by the might of the north, but by the treachery of man. The thought aroused Homer from the stupor of his grief and revitalized him with a consuming hatred, with a black, blind, resistless desire for revenge.

When night came Kenneth Poole was buried in the sand above high-water mark. A mass of boulders was heaped above his grave. The ordeal was severe, both physically and emotionally, and Homer had been able to meet it only because his thoughts were centered upon a canoe speeding eastward, a canoe which somehow, some time, he must overtake that he might kill the man who paddled it.

At dawn the next day he started. His experience and knowledge of the country should have told him that pursuit was hopeless. He was on foot, weakened by privation, balked by detours, swift rivers and boulder-filled stretches of shore-line. He had only his sleeping robe, rifle and ammunition; and, if he were to survive, he must take time from traveling to hunt food.

The cache thief was well supplied with flour and pork, with a tent to shelter him from cold rains and snow, with extra clothing and with a canoe that would enable him to travel far with a heavy load at a minimum expense of energy. He had two routes open to him; one by way of Chesterfield Inlet and Hudson Bay and the other up the Kazan River and down the Ferguson. And the water trail would not leave a hint as to which he had taken.

But heartbreaking as the odds were, Homer ignored them. He would not even accept the possibility of failure. The chances were a hundred to one that he would die as he lagged in the chase; but his consuming passion thrust aside all his hard-earned knowledge of the north and drove him on.

This implacable purpose might have carried him far, or rage might have so sapped his strength and so blinded him to his physical needs that he would have soon perished. The point was never put to a test. He had traveled only six miles eastward on the shore of Baker Lake when, on turning a point, he saw less than a hundred yards away the tent which had sheltered Kenneth and himself so many times. Drawn up on the shore near it was their canoe.

Instantly he dropped to the ground and crawled to the shelter of a bunch of coarse grass and studied the scene before him. The tent flaps were tied together. The pipe of the little sheet-iron stove projected above the ridge-pole, but no smoke came from it.

After satisfying himself that the cache thief was either absent or lying unsuspectingly within, Homer advanced. In either case he knew he could surprise him, and as he moved slowly and steadily toward the tent there was about him a suggestion of irresistible force.

He was weakened by exhaustion and hunger, and Kenneth's slayer had been nourished by Kenneth's food; yet never for an instant did he doubt the outcome. He felt that he was not alone but legion, that all the clean courage of the north was with him, that the all-prevading spirit of the wilderness protected him even as it demanded that he avenge the defamation of its creed.

When he was a few yards from the tent a ripple of the sides stopped him. He cocked his rifle and called,

"Come out!"

A glimpse of fingers untying the knots sent his heart to leaping. He raised his weapon and a grin of triumph distorted his drawn, haggard features.

Then the flaps were thrown back and a woman stood before him.

THEY stood staring at each other; the woman aghast before the berserk which had confronted her so unexpectedly and so unaccountably, Homer sick with the sudden realization of the futility of his wrath.

Had the material evidence of her guilt been lacking, the fear in her eyes would have condemned her. To Homer her undisguised terror meant only a dread of the consequences of her act; for his passion had removed all consciousness of self and of the terrifying picture he presented.

A specter, a caricature of a human being, features drawn by privation and twisted by rage, eyes wide with fatigue and blazing with the urge to kill, he had come upon her out of a land she had believed empty of life.

The very futility of Homer's rage intensified it. Unconsciously he swayed toward her, his rifle still ready, and as instinctively she stepped back, gripping the tent flap as if it might afford protection.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

It was more of an accusation than a question, a protest that she should be there at all, a curse upon the soft body that had been kept alive by the food for which Kenneth Poole had dragged himself through six days and nights of torture.

In Homer's eyes her sex detracted nothing from her guilt. He looked upon her only as a murderess, but a murderess immune from his revenge; and because she had cheated him of that which hours of brooding had rendered unutterably sweet, he hated her the more intensely.

Despite the glare of hatred in his eyes the woman seemed to find relief in his question.

"Our motor boat was wrecked," she said. "Father and the men were drowned."

Instantly he saw it all; a woman, soft and alone and afraid, battling against the heavy odds before which strong men have gone down. He understood why the canoe had been dragged, not carried, from the cache to the water and why camp had been made only six miles away.

It represented the limit of a woman's strength and yet the futility of her act only maddened him the more. Why could she not have remained at the cache? She would have been welcome to the shelter and the food and she would have been there when Kenneth came, to care for him and keep him alive.

Instead she had stolen everything, had paddled a few insignificant miles away, had been lying warm and well fed so near the spot where a true son of the north was paying the price of her selfishness. The very greed and ruthless folly of her act killed any sympathy Homer might have had.

"And you thought you could get out alone?" he sneered.

"But I'm not alone," she explained.

"Not alone! What do you mean? Who is with you?"

"Wayne Ballard. We are the only ones who got ashore."

"Ballard!" Homer repeated. "You mean there is a man here? In the tent?"

His eyes flashed with pure joy. It had been a man after all, and he was not to be cheated of the only thing left him in life. But his sudden delight and eagerness so added to the woman's terror she could not answer.

"Where is he?" Homer repeated.

"He is gone now, getting fuel."

"Which way?"

She pointed down the shore. Homer looked. There was no one in sight, yet the intensity of his desire forced him in that direction. He took a dozen steps and then stopped. If he missed the man, both of them might escape in the canoe. He strode back to the woman.

"Your motor boat was wrecked, eh?" he demanded. "How?"

"It struck bottom, way out from shore, in a storm," she answered.

"Didn't your men know the lake is full of sandbars at this end?"

"They had never been here before."

"Where did you come from?"

"Marble Island, in Hudson Bay. A ship took us there from Montreal."

"A fur company's ship, eh? What were you doing in this country?"

"Father and Mr. Ballard came after musk oxen. We have been up the Ark-i-lin-ik River."

In fresh agony of spirit Homer turned away. He and Kenneth had been of the north's workers. These people, a rich man's hunting expedition, had come into the north to play and, with the ruthless selfishness of those who only play, they had taken Kenneth's food and Kenneth's life. He knew he could not make a woman settle such an account, but he could hurt her, and he wheeled back with a sneer.

"And all this, the tent and robes and food and canoe, you saved from the wreck, I suppose?"

"No," she said, "only the canoe. It was washed up on shore. Mr. Ballard found the rest. It had been thrown away by our men at the last portage on the river."

The lie was so clumsy and so palpable that Homer stared incredulously.

"Thrown away!" he repeated. "Men threw away food in the north!"

"Yes, they had grumbled about carrying it back. The motor-boat was waiting for us at the mouth of the river and it was well stocked."

She spoke so simply and so naturally that Homer looked at the familiar tent for confirmation of his knowledge that it was his own.

"Did you know they had thrown it away?" he asked.

"No. Mr. Ballard found it by accident. He had been looking for wreckage along the shore, something that would help us, and he found the canoe. He paddled to the rapids just above the mouth of the river to see if, by chance, anything had been left."

An unmistakable frankness in her tone and a growing assurance puzzled Homer and he pressed his examination more ruthlessly.

"This Ballard, he knows the country?"

"He was never here before, but he is famous as a big-game hunter. It was he who interested father in this trip."

"But why did you wait here? Why didn't you go on?"

"I couldn't! Wouldn't! In that storm, and so soon after father——"

"But you didn't expect to stay here all winter?" he persisted.

"Of course not," she answered. "They will search for us."

"They? Who? Not men from the fur company's ship?"

She nodded.

"Come four hundred miles looking for you? At this time of year?"

He had made no effort to spare her and for the first time his ruthlessness aroused her.

"Why shouldn't they?" she retorted.

"Why should they?"

Even as he asked the question he appraised her in one contemptuous glance. He counted her as nothing and he held out no hope of sympathy or aid.

"Because they had their orders to pick us up at Marble Island," she answered indignantly. "They know who we are and that they will be well paid. It was the agreement we had with the owners. They wouldn't dare to go off without us. It would be worse than murder."

"Bah!"

Homer pushed past her into the tent, infuriated afresh by her petty talk of payment and by her reference to murder when the blood was flowing in her veins only because it had ceased to flow in Kenneth's.

Bewildered, she watched his face while he looked down at the bags of food. Then, as if in sudden realization of what might have caused this mad demeanor, she picked up the frying-pan.

"Can't I get you—" she began.

She did not finish the sentence. Homer wheeled upon her, his face twisted by grief and rage. He felt that he would kill her with his bare hands if she so much a touched the food for which Kenneth had died.

"Don't!" he shrieked. "Get out of here!"

In spite of his agonized effort at self-control he made a movement toward her, his hands twitching. With a smothered cry she turned and fled.

RELIEVED of her presence, Homer fell victim to memories aroused by his familiar surroundings. His rage vanished and his grief became more poignant than when he had turned away from Kenneth's grave. On the canvas floor were their joint possessions. There were the extra sleeping-bags, his and Kenneth's. In a corner was the little stove before which they had sat so many times, in so many places.

That stiff, unnaturally cramped thing he had found the day before had not been real, had not been Kenneth. But here Kenneth lived again, lived with a vividness that was the more taunting because it was false.

"Ken! Ken!"

With a cry of utter desolation and intolerable loneliness he went down on his knees before the little stove.

How long he remained there he did not know, but when he arose he was strangely comforted and strengthened. It was not that he had laid upon this altar his resolve to avenge the death of his comrade. Rather his resolve had passed through the cleansing fire of grief, had become spiritualized, had been purged of the petty desire to hurt as he had been hurt.

There had entered into it, too, the quality of inevitability. It had become as inexorable as the laws of the north itself, as impersonal, pitiless and just.

He kindled a fire, mixed a bannock and cut some bacon. In less than half an hour his meal was ready and he began to eat. As the warm food gave him physical strength, it brought back a more normal mental attitude and he was able to consider his problem with greater objectivity. It was then that the very code which gave him the right of vengeance rose up to mock him.

The law of the cache is only one of the unwritten, unbreathed and unquestioned laws of the north. And because these laws are so few, so inherent and so austerely just they can not be dissociated. The rule which gave Homer the right to take the life of the cache thief imposed upon him the task of saving the life of the woman. It was not her sex, but her helplessness which made this duty inescapable.

Because he knew the north so well and understood its uncertainties Homer saw, as a distinct corollary of this duty, the inevitable postponement of his vengeance. So long as the woman was in danger he had no right to rob her of any advantage in the struggle that must ensue. However craven the man she had called Ballard might be, he was still a man physically, possessed of a man's strength, and that strength must be saved to help her reach safety.

The thought was maddening. Day after day he must fight side by side with this man who had killed Kenneth Poole. They must toil and suffer together, swing a paddle in the same rhythm, sit down to the same meals, meals stolen from Kenneth. Never for an instant could he forget who this man was or what he had done or what might have been. And always he must withhold his hand until the rescue of the woman was assured.

But even as it imposes its laws upon all who come within its borders, the north also teaches them patience. Homer had learned this lesson thoroughly and now he profited by it. Because he had often been forced to wait he could force himself now, and rather than wait idly he sprang to action.

He went outside to look for the woman. Far down the beach to the east he saw two tiny figures. He watched them a moment and saw that they were coming toward him. He turned at once and began to pack. When the man and the woman were still half a mile away the tent, food and equipment were piled beside the canoe and Homer was waiting eagerly for the journey to begin, the journey which was to end in the avenging of his comrade's death.

WHEN Theo Spencer ran in terror from the mad stranger, her one thought was to find Wayne Ballard. More than at any time since the wreck of the motor-boat she felt herself depending upon him and longing for the comfort of his presence. Fear had caused her capitulation then, and now no woman of the caves ever searched the horizon for her returning mate with more anxious eyes.

Her surrender had been long in coming, and in the end it had not been induced so much by the dogged patience of Ballard as by the tragic action of the north itself. The north had played his game for him, had played it with more disastrous results than he could have wished, but it had woven the situation in which he had finally gained dominance.

From the time of their first meeting in New York there had been a struggle rather than a wooing, a battle for supremacy rather than a desire for surrender. They had met as peers, each abundantly supplied with the essentials of their world. Beauty was matched with a peculiar prestige bequeathed by a famous line of sportsmen and augmented by personal achievement. The rating of Wall Street was opposed by the rank of birth. Either could have made strategic terms in matrimony long before, but neither desired that which could be bought easily.

The expedition after musk-oxen had not been conscious maneuvering by Ballard for an advantageous position. His description of a hunting expedition had aroused the interest of Theo's father and between them the journey had been arranged. Speed and success were necessary. Ballard was able to furnish the experience and the direction; but, as always, he had been forced to trade them for the financial burden. The heavy expense had fallen to Mr. Spencer, a fact which had enabled Theo to carry into the wilderness the subtle defenses of her own world.

Then disaster overtook them and instantly everything was changed. For the first time she had nothing to give, nothing upon which she could depend for resistance. When she recovered consciousness and learned that everything had been lost, that her father and the men were drowned, the motor-boat wrecked, the equipment destroyed and that Ballard and she alone were saved and were without food, shelter or means of transportation, she had turned wholly to Ballard. The sense of property had ruled her life so long that she accepted its logical conclusions.

As the strength of one individual is built upon the weakness of another, her terrified dependence stiffened the courage of Wayne Ballard. He had learned the inevitable terms of the north, not from experience, but from other men's lips. In the first hours after the disaster he had believed that they must accept them and grapple as punily and as futilely as other men had grappled. He alone knew how his spirit had gone down in defeat before that thought.

But when Theo had turned to him, when she had clung to him, sobbing in terror and despair, the intoxication of her surrender had wakened all his fighting courage. Despite the hopelessness of the search, when he left her to look for wreckage he was flushed with confidence and determined to compel a way to life from their seemingly inexorable environment. He returned with all the essentials of existence; and to the mate he had saved he came as a conqueror.

But complete as his victory had seemed to be, he was only too well aware of the nature of its foundation. As she ran toward him along the sandy shore after the stranger's arrival he felt that foundation crumbling.

"Theo!" he cried. "What has happened?"

"Oh, I've been so frightened!" she sobbed as she threw herself into his arms. "A man came! To the tent! He drove me away."

Though Ballard had steeled himself for this moment his face was white as he looked over her shoulder in the direction of the camp. Then he moistened his lips nervously and asked:

"A man, you say? What sort? A white man?"

"Yes, a white man with such a strange and terrible face. I can't tell you how strange and terrible it was."

"And he drove you away!"

He started to run. Then he looked back, saw Theo stumbling after and waited.

"Here! Give me your hand!"

He had tried to speak reassuringly, but she caught the note of fear in his voice.

"What is it?" she demanded.

"Nothing, only for a moment I was frightened by the idea of a stranger being left alone with our supplies."

Even after the acquisition of the tent, canoe, sleeping robes and food supplies, Theo had never been able to forget the horror of that first day when they had been so helpless and so hopeless. As much to ward off the return of that despair as to disclaim responsibility, she recalled every word and gesture of the mad stranger.

"But he wouldn't take anything!" she protested. "When I offered him something to eat he turned on me."

"You mean he drove you away from the food?" he asked sharply.

"No, not just that. I can't tell you. I was so afraid of him. I think he was crazed by starvation and exposure."

"What did he tell you about himself?"

"Nothing, and he didn't give me time to ask. He hurled one question after another at me."

"What did you tell him?"

"Just what happened."

"Did he ask why we were camped there, right where we had been wrecked? Did he ask why we waited? Why we hadn't gone on? What did you tell him?"

"The truth, of course. How it had been storming so and I was afraid of the water."

"Did you tell him that I wanted to go on, but that you thought the risk was too great?"

"Yes; but why, Wayne?"

Ballard did not answer. He was running faster now, apparently unconscious of her stumbling efforts to keep up. Because he had dreaded it constantly there had been no doubt, after Theo's first statement, as to the identity of the stranger. Now her answers to the man's questions had condemned him and had made any sort of explanation impossible.

From the moment he had found the cache he had been battling his conscience with the thought that the owner had gone far away, and that in all probability he would never return to the necessities which meant life itself to Theo and to him. His careful examination of the place had failed to disclose signs of recent occupancy. The very lateness of the season had been an argument in his favor.

But now he was about to meet the man he had robbed. He did not know what the next hour would bring forth. He could not believe the stranger would share what had been stolen from him. And yet, inspired afresh by the savagery and ruthlessness of the land, he was determined that he would not relinquish what he had gained.

They rounded a point and a low exclamation from Theo brought Ballard to a halt.

"The tent!" she cried. "It's gone!"

The familiar triangle of canvas against the sand-bank was missing, but near the spot where it had stood was the canoe and the outfit. Beside them a man was waiting.

HOMER arose as the pair approached. His summary packing of the outfit had all the simplicity of a nature fundamentally direct. When he had accepted the responsibility of the woman's safety he had recognized the vital need of speed. Winter was at hand. Every second was precious. The sea which had terrified her was only a heavy ground swell harmless to a northman.

His sense of ownership of the supplies had blinded him to the interpretation they might put upon his act; but as they came toward him he sensed the bewildered protest of the woman and the challenging alertness of the man. He had known, too, that sooner or later they must come to an understanding; but because it had been at such great effort that he had just disciplined himself to the justice his soul had glimpsed, it was an ordeal for which he was not yet ready.

"I have packed up so that we can start at once," he said quickly.

It was a strange situation. Physically he and Ballard met for the first time, yet each had carried the other through an emotional crisis of such intensity that even the shadow of a preface seemed absurd. Consequently the abruptness of his statement was startling only to Theo, while to Ballard it was the one undreamed of possibility in the situation.

"Start where?"

His question was more of a demand as to the meaning of the attitude behind the words than an inquiry as to the destination, but Homer ignored it.

"To meet the searching party, of course. You said you expected one."

He had turned to Theo as he spoke.

"But I won't travel in such a storm!"

She voiced her objection simply and decisively, as though it were incredible that anything except her wishes should be the deciding factor in the situation.

"But you have to. Every hour of fair weather is precious."

Unconsciously he had spoken as one speaks to an unreasoning child, but as he did so he glanced at her again and for the first time saw her with a vision unobscured by the mists of rage. He paused for a moment in that tribute which her beauty compelled from all men.

For she had beauty. It rose above her surroundings and proclaimed itself, even in an environment which made more than the most elementary care of the body an impossibility.

Homer had thought of her as a helpless, terrified girl. Now he saw that there was a maturity in her slenderness, an assurance in her dark and well-set eyes and a confident carriage of her head which not only pronounced her a successful woman, but one with a full knowledge of her success.

Even as she recognized the unconscious tribute of his glance Theo flared at what he had said.

"Have to!" she echoed. "What right have you to dictate to us?"

Before Homer could answer, Ballard, as if fearing what the reply might be, stepped between them. Yet he was more in the dark than Theo. He had come prepared to fight; for to him the matter had gone beyond a matter of justice. Whatever principles he had violated, whatever crime he had committed, he was determined not to allow the supplies to pass out of his hands.

And now this man whom he had not only robbed, but whom he was prepared to kill if necessary, was planning, with surface sincerity at least, to get all three to safety.

"Do you mean," he asked, "that you want to go with us?"

"I mean," Homer answered quietly, "that you are going to help me get this woman out of the barren grounds."

It was impossible for Ballard to understand the inference in the words, for he did not know the travail through which Homer's spirit had passed. Homer stood there, his rifle on his arm, the canoe behind him, presenting an unconscious picture of vigilance and strength. An attack upon him could end only in one way. Ballard turned naturally to conciliation.

"It is your interest in Miss Spencer's safety which induces your haste?" he asked.

"Exactly."

"Then why do your motives the injustice of seeming to compel a terrified woman to repeat a harrowing experience on the lake?"

"I had no intention of seeming to compel," Homer copied the other's manner. "I am merely telling you that we are starting now."

Ballard flushed angrily and started forward, but Theo stopped him.

"Wait," she entreated in a whisper, and then, turning to Homer, she continued placatingly, as one speaking to a person with disordered faculties:

"Perhaps you don't understand. There is no need for us to risk our lives to reach the searching party. We have a distinct understanding with the owners of the ship."

"What understanding?"

"That the ship wait for us at Marble Island."

"Exactly. Wait for you. But the captain knows he must get his ship through the straits before winter. He can't stay beyond the safety limit, and the first winter gale will decide him."

"He wouldn't dare!" Theo cried. "He has his instructions from the owners."

"And the owners are in Montreal. Who is the captain? Longman?"

"Yes."

"Then the sooner we start the better."

As he spoke he turned toward the canoe. Ballard sprang forward.

"What are you doing?" he demanded.

Homer only dragged the canoe closer to the water and then reached for a pack. Theo leaped in front of him.

"Are you mad?" she cried. "This is ours."

"Yours!"

The word came in a bellow as Homer whirled, not upon the woman but upon Ballard.

If his previous restraint had been perplexing, all mystification vanished now. Ballard not only knew that he had been condemned as a thief, but he was aware that an implacable fury had been aroused and that death was staring at him from the other's eyes. Homer stood before him, his right hand bent claw-like and reaching slowly upward, the veins of his neck throbbing with his passion, his breath coming in whistling gasps.

In that tense moment vital issues were settled without a word. Even when Homer gained self-control and Ballard saw the threatened death withdrawn, he knew it was by the other's will and not by his own.

"Now," Homer asked quietly, "do we start?"

Ballard realized that he lived only because the other man had spared him. He was still under the spell of death and his answer was an instinctive acknowledgment of Homer's power to impose his will.

"Yes," he said simply, "we will go."

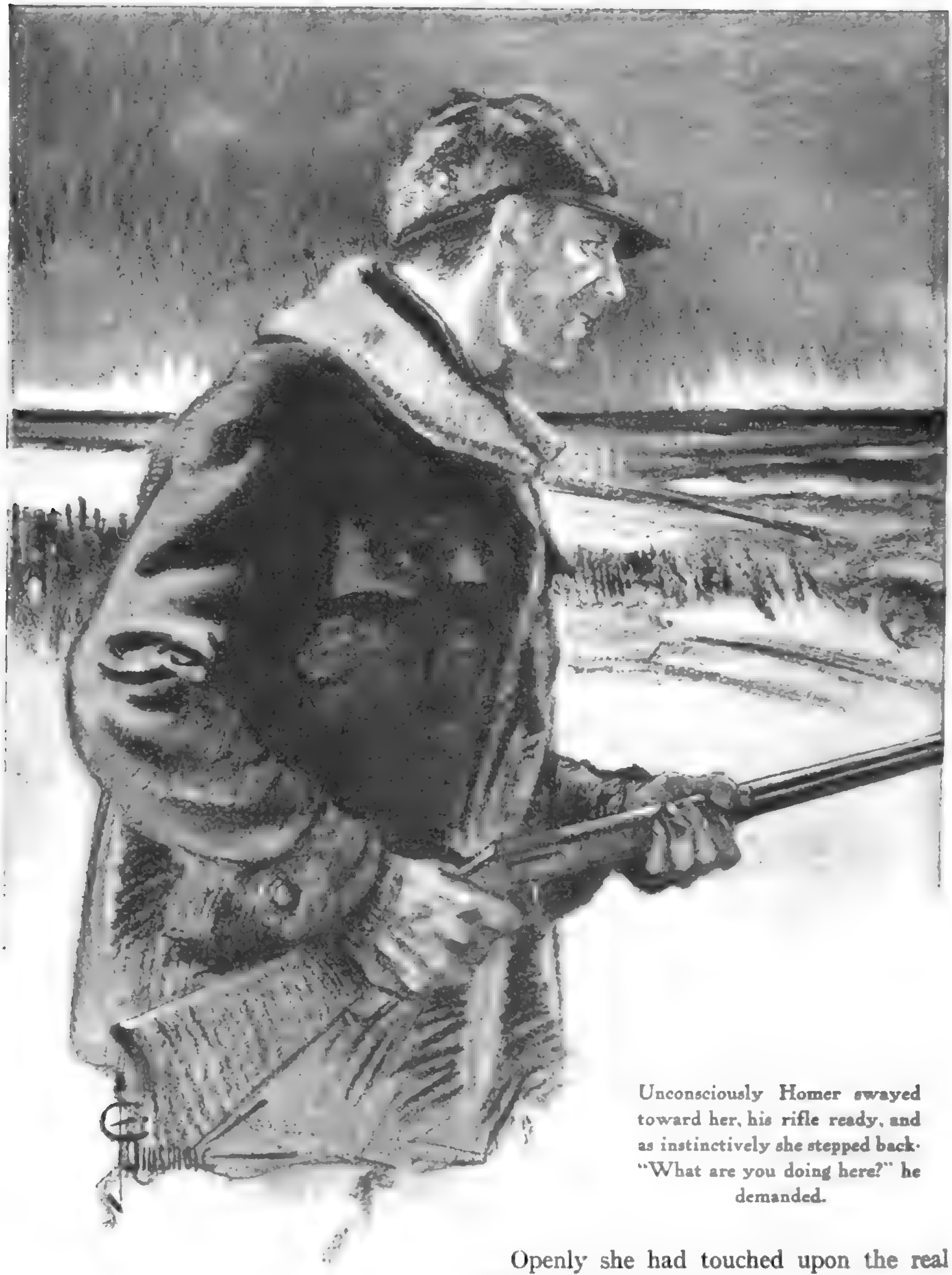
Although one had robbed the cache that she might live and the other had withheld his revenge that she might reach safety, both men had forgotten Theo's presence until she started forward in furious protest.

"Wayne!" and her voice was shrill with disbelief. "What do you mean? We are not going in such a sea!"

Until that moment she had not doubted the outcome of the situation. She had seen in Ballard's hesitancy only an effort to conciliate rather than to force. When he had started forward she had kept at his side, ready to avail herself of any relaxation in the stranger's guard. Even when the two men had stood facing each other she had held herself in readiness, thinking it was the forerunner of battle.

And then the struggle had ended with mysterious suddenness. There was something bafflingly intangible about it, and because she lacked all knowledge of their previous relations, she could see in Ballard's subjugation only a cowardly retreat before the bare threat of physical encounter. Her unconcealed contempt whipped him into a weak defense.

"But the man is right," he said. "Time is precious."



Unconsciously Homer swayed toward her, his rifle ready, and as instinctively she stepped back. "What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"You didn't think so a moment ago."

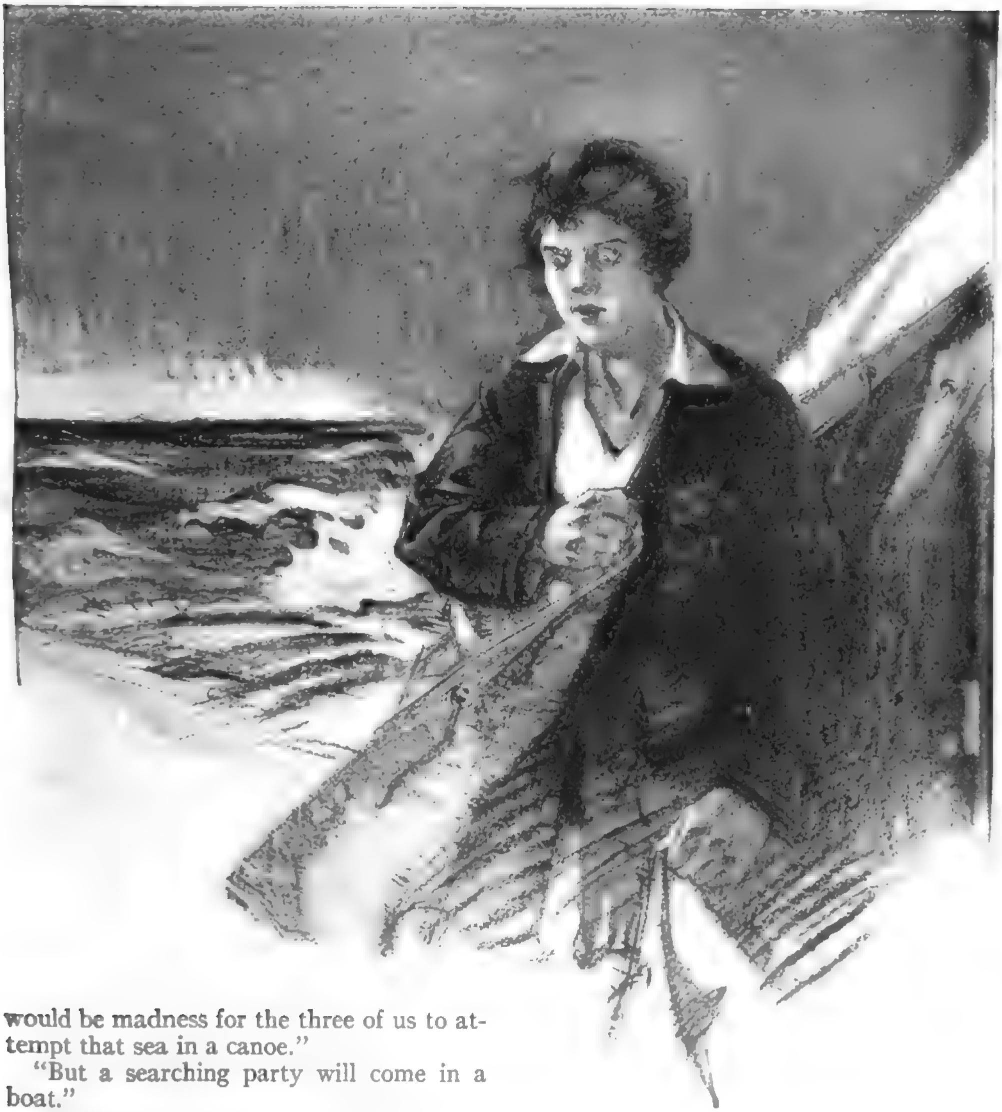
"But Theo!" he pleaded. "Isn't that unimportant beside the bigger question of getting out?"

"Unimportant!" she repeated. "The fact that we share what little food we have with another!"

Openly she had touched upon the real basis of her opposition.

"But it means two men to paddle and makes our success more certain," Ballard argued.

"Makes our deaths more certain!" she corrected savagely. "Don't you see what he wants? He hasn't anything. We have tent and canoe and food. He wants them, but he doesn't dare leave us stranded. It



would be madness for the three of us to attempt that sea in a canoe."

"But a searching party will come in a boat."

"It would be a large one."

"And the man in charge would decide what seas we would attempt, not you."

"The man in charge, yes!" Theo answered. "I should expect that. But this—this interloper, with nothing of his own! What right has he even to ask that he ride in our boat or eat our food?"

She flung the question at Ballard tauntingly, trying to whip him into revolt. Homer watched them with a curious sense of detachment. Whether he answered her or not, whether she felt that he was an interloper living on their bounty, or whether her will was broken by a knowledge of what she owed him, seemed of no consequence. All he cared was that they should start at once that he might accomplish his task and obtain his revenge.

Neither was he greatly interested whether Ballard confessed his crime. Nothing the man might do or say could modify the sentence which had been passed upon him. From all that had been said Homer had derived the one fact that the woman was innocent of complicity in the rifling of the cache, that the man had lied to her, and this made his task of rescue a little easier to bear.

"Theo," Ballard exclaimed desperately, "there are some things you can't understand——"

"I can at least understand that I am dependent upon a coward!" she interrupted scornfully.

"Stop that!" Homer commanded sharply.

He was nauseated by their petty bickering. It was less than twenty-four hours since he had found his friend's body and he was still in the grip of an emotional crisis of supreme intensity.

"You seem to forget" and he turned to the woman "that you are in the exact center of the greatest uninhabited area on the continent. You are four hundred miles by canoe from Marble Island. While you are calling this man a coward the rescue boat may be turning back less than five miles away. If it does, where are you and what are you up against? Let me tell you:

"You are seven hundred miles from the nearest white man. You are in the center of the barren grounds the day before winter. You haven't food to last you three weeks. You have no means of getting more. You've got to make a harder fight than that in which a good many men have failed.

"I belong to the north and because I belong to the north I know that I have a duty to perform. I've got to help get you out. That food" and he pointed scornfully to the supplies beside the canoe "isn't going to save you. It's meat, hundreds and hundreds of pounds of it, and the skins of caribou for clothing, that will be the final factor. And it's going to be my job to get them.

"As for not wanting to start now, by waiting here on a day when you should be traveling you have shown that you are not big enough to meet the situation. So it's up to me to meet it for you."

He turned and shoved the canoe closer to the pounding surf. He did not do this with an air of "do as I say or be damned." There was nothing petty or domineering in his manner; but rather an unescapable sincerity and vigor which was the more arresting because of the petty outburst he had interrupted.

Theo was humiliated by the contrast and she found herself suddenly and unaccountably convinced of the stranger's strength. Ballard had failed her. Through Homer she saw an escape from the terrifying, crushing north. Yet because she wished to share in success and not responsibility she asked,

"You are sure there is no danger?"

"The north is always dangerous," Homer answered. "If you mean traveling in that sea, I've traveled in far worse many times."

"Very well," she said.

HOMER acknowledged her capitulation only by immediate directions to Ballard as to his part in getting the canoe through the surf. It was difficult work and Theo's fears returned overwhelmingly in the first few minutes as they struggled to the calmer waters out from shore.

Once on the long, high rollers Homer devoted his attention to Ballard. The man possessed the mediocre skill of the sportsman who has always depended upon guides. He was strong enough, he pulled well enough, and practice would eliminate his worst faults. Homer was satisfied that under ordinary circumstances he would prove of greater assistance than he had hoped.

For two hours they made fair progress. Then low clouds began to overtake the setting sun and with them came a head wind out of the east. It was not strong but irritatingly steady and demanded constant and increased exertion at the paddles.

Just before sunset they rounded a point and found themselves facing a long arm running far to the west. Homer glanced at the eastern sky, estimated the distance and kept straight on toward the distant shoreline. Theo looked back questioningly.

"This bay won't cause us any trouble after it's behind us," he said. "We can make it."

But he had not counted on his own lowered vitality or on Ballard weakening under the unaccustomed strain. Darkness came when they were in the center of the long traverse and in the last bit of light Homer saw a squall rushing toward them out of the east.

"Dig in!" he shouted. "There's some stiff paddling ahead of us."

In the darkness the squall struck almost without warning. The canoe began to pitch in the short, choppy waves and spray dashed over them.

"Don't balance!" Homer shouted to Ballard. "Sway with the canoe. When you get the chance, pull."

His words were an admission to himself that there was danger. He realized that his great desire to travel as far as possible had influenced his judgment and that all his skill, experience and strength would be necessary to get them through.

He settled himself grimly to the task. Hate and bitterness were forgotten. Beneath him the canoe became a sensate thing. His knees tightly wedged against the sides established communication with the craft, made it a part of himself and brought to him instantly and unerringly each movement of the others.

The wind increased with quick, furious bursts. A few drops of rain mingled with the spray and then swirling, driving snow enveloped and blinded them. Squalls rushed so suddenly out of the black night that Homer was unable to prepare for them. In spite of his efforts the bow would swing off or strike too hard in that crucial moment before the sickening drop into the trough.

The darkness and storm and the roar of wind and crashing of waves heightened the feeling of isolation engendered by his sense of sole responsibility. He forgot there were others in the canoe, forgot why he was there, forgot his tortured body. He knew only that if the paddle were to twist in his numb fingers the end would come, and he battled to maintain his grip.

How long he struggled thus he had no means of knowing. Times without number he felt that the end had come. A huge wave would lift them high and fling them into the trough. The wind would whirl the bow around in spite of all his strength and skill.

Sobbing in his exhaustion, battling automatically, he felt the canoe rise on a wave higher than any that had gone before. The curling crest reached out hungry fingers for the gunwale, gripped and held it. In a last desperate effort Homer swung far out, dug in his paddle and pulled with all the strength he could muster.

In spite of his effort the canoe shipped half a barrel of water and dropped into the trough like a deer shot in mid-leap. It struggled on with the same fear-impelled energy that drives the wild creature in its last moments. Homer felt the craft giving up its life beneath him. It was no longer a live, lithe, valiant thing. Gone was its buoyancy and its ability to fight. Logged and supine, it seemed to await the end.

Even as he admitted failure, Homer continued to push forward. The canoe rose slowly on the next wave and he knew the breaking crest would fill it.

But the swift, giddy, tossing motion suddenly ceased. The canoe dropped heavily, though easily, rose a little way and fell again.

They were behind a point. In the very moment of disaster they had reached shelter. The great, curling crest which had gripped the gunwale had been the last.

A glad cry burst from Homer's lips. He took three sharp strokes and the bow dug into the sand.

THOUGH every muscle was tortured by the strain, though his lungs were bursting and his fingers were almost useless from the cold, Homer sprang at once to action.

"Out! Quick!" he shouted to Ballard. "Pull her up as far as you can."

He began to lift the flour and sleeping bags and throw them forward. The canoe heaved ahead as Ballard tugged at it. The water swirled back over Theo, who was still huddled in the bottom.

In a moment Homer had the essential equipment piled on the sand and covered with the tent. Then he waded back beside the canoe to help Theo. She was so numb from cold she could hardly move, and he half lifted and half dragged her out and set her on her feet.

"Come on," he commanded as he took one of her hands. "Run! Fast!"

He started, dragging her after him. She hung back, for her cramped, chilled legs were almost useless and each movement brought torture.

"Here, Ballard," Homer called. "Take her other hand. We all need it."

Ballard groped toward them in the darkness and together they ran back and forth, the woman sagging between them.

"Feel better?" Homer asked at last when, panting and staggering before the wind, they halted beside the canoe.

His solicitation loosened her fury.

"Better!" and her voice was shrill. "You ask that after what you have done! You—you beast! You tried to murder us! Don't you think I understand? I saw it from the first. You wanted our tent and canoe and food so that you could get out. Only you have tried to cover it up with this pretense of helping us."

Her attack had all the illogic of hysteria. Homer would have reasoned with her, would have pointed out the absurdity of her charges, but she did not give him the opportunity.

"Who are you?" she continued in a fresh outburst. "What right have you to impose your judgment upon us? Do you think you rule this country? Do you think you are a god?"

"Yes," he retorted. "I am a god for once, the god of the north."

He turned to the work of making camp.

THE barren grounds are green and flower-strewn one day—the next they are white and blizzard-blown. Winter never quite relinquishes its clutch upon them. Even in the brief summer there are spasmodic tightenings of the brumal fingers and then, in the latter part of September, they suddenly close in an adamantine grip.

Homer knew the storm which had brought his battle out on the lake marked the end of fair weather. He knew it would last for several days and he foresaw the pure misery that would result for all three.

Even to attain the cheerless shelter of the tent would be a task in the darkness and driving snow and whipping wind. But because he had met such situations before, because he knew the necessity of erecting a barrier against the storm, he plunged into the work with that disregard for exhaustion which all dwellers in the north must achieve.

He hauled out the canoe, emptied it and turned it over the sleeping-robes and food.

"Come here, Ballard," he called. "We've got to get this tent up somehow."

Together they went back from the shore, stumbling about in the darkness, hoping to find a sand-bank which would provide shelter from the wind. After five minutes Homer gave up the search.

"We'll have to do the best we can!" he shouted. "Any place will do. Give me those poles."

Time and again they lifted the tent only to have it torn loose by the gale. Grasping the wet cloth with their stiff fingers caused torture; yet the tent was erected and made fast because it had to be. The equipment was carried in and Theo led to its shelter by Ballard while Homer weighted down the canoe with rocks.

When he entered the tent he found the woman huddled in a croner, moaning and shivering. Her rage had burned itself out. She was completely subdued by physical discomfort.

"Can't we have a fire?" she begged.

"There is no fuel," Homer answered. "Nor any possibility of getting it."

"But we must have a fire!" she protested. "I'm wet through."

"We all are, and there's only one thing to do. Ballard and I will sit down here near the door. Take off your clothes and crawl into my caribou bag. It's dry and you'll soon be all right."

"But, I say——!" Ballard began.

"Oh, keep quiet!" Homer snapped. "It's dark in here. You can go outside if you wish, but I won't. The three of us will have to put up with a lot of things before we get out."

"There is no reason, just because we're—" Ballard began again.

"Never mind, Wayne," Theo interrupted. "Nothing matters except that I get warm."

Homer heard her unlacing her boots. He took off his own wet outer garments, slipped into the warm, dry interior of a caribou sleeping-bag and stretched across the door of the tent. In a moment he was asleep.

Through four nights and four days the storm continued without cessation. Sometimes the snow stopped falling, but the air was always filled with driving, stinging particles. The wet tent froze and it rattled and boomed. The surf crashed close by. The wind shrieked and moaned. The north itself seemed articulate, shouting, screaming and roaring its menace.

Within the tent pure misery reigned. Wet, chilled and hungry, the two men lay in a stupor of wretchedness. There was no friendship to make their suffering more endurable. Instead hate, fattening on their despondency and suspicions, became so strong that it dominated everything and seemed to assume form and sit among them.

Theo held both men responsible for her wretchedness. Nothing in her soft life had given her the least preparation for such an ordeal and her suffering demanded an object for her resentment. Thus Homer became to her a domineering tyrant and Ballard a coward who had failed to protect her.

Ballard was too absorbed in his own problem to be affected by her attitude. Except for that one outburst, Homer had given him no indication of the motive behind the strange determination to rescue them. Accusations or denunciations would have been preferable.

Homer himself could have passed scatheless through the four days and nights of physical wretchedness, for he had long been accustomed to privation and had acquired that philosophical attitude toward it which is so essential in the north. In the first twenty-four hours he slept almost continuously.

But when he wakened his rage began to feed upon his inactivity. Hour after hour he could do nothing except lie there and think of Kenneth Poole and how he had died, of the two who were alive because Kenneth was dead and of the close association that must endure until the woman was safe.

He saw Ballard, silent and watchful, breaking under the strain, and because his hate demanded some satisfaction he never brought up the subject of the cache. But even the joys of hate are wearing, and on the third day, in an effort to escape from the tent and all that it meant to him, he went out in search for fuel.

Several miles to the west he found a small stream fringed with a few dwarf willows and carried back a bundle of twigs. It was barely enough to prepare a meal; but even in the brief period in which the tent was warm all three became a little more like human beings and less like suffering animals.

THE next day Homer started toward the east in search of more fuel. Ballard, worn by suspense and unable to conceive of greater physical misery than he had endured in the tent, braved the storm and accompanied him.

All his life Ballard had chosen the smoothest path. Down hill or on the level, he sought only the route presenting the fewest obstructions and requiring the least effort.

Now he saw himself facing days and possibly weeks in Homer's company, and he wanted not only to remove the barrier between them, but to learn the other's purpose. When they had found fuel and had gathered two pitiful bundles of it he plunged into his explanation.

"I say," he began, "I'm mighty sorry about that cache. But you can see the position we were in. It seemed as if some Providence——"

He broke off, suddenly aware of the tenseness of Homer's attitude. Then he stumbled on in growing confusion as he saw the demon his words seemed to have aroused.

"We were starving, you know. Miss Spencer would have perished. I am sure you are the sort who would have shared with us. And when we get out there is nothing we won't do to repay you——"

He stopped again. This time he felt death very close to him, closer even than it had been in their first meeting.

There was something terrible in Homer's face as the lust to kill writhed under the need of postponement. Ballard licked his lips and forced himself to continue.

"I've always meant to tell Miss Spencer some time. Now she doesn't understand. But when she has recovered from this terrible experience, when we are safe, both of us will gladly pay——"

"Stop!" In the agony of Homer's repressed desire the word was a supplication rather than a command. "Stop! Before I kill you!"

With an effort he gained his self-control and then continued in a voice so level and so toneless it seemed like the dispassioned utterance of a supreme tribunal.

"You will pay; but not in the way you have ever paid before. It is not a matter between you and me, Ballard. It never was. Your case has been tried and settled, even though you did not know it.

"You have broken the laws of the north. Men had nothing to do with making them. The north made them for men and fixed the penalties. You stole, and the law is that you shall repay, repay *exactly the cost of the goods.*

"When you robbed that cache, when you took all, you took a human life, one of the north's own. And the penalty has been fixed for you, *exactly the cost of the goods.*"

"What did you say?" Ballard whispered as the other's meaning dawned upon him. "The cache belonged to you, didn't it? And you are——"

"Not to me alone," Homer interrupted. "If it had, I would have helped you out, yellow as you are. But it belonged to two of us, to my partner and me. He built that cache. We were to have met there and then go out together.

"But he was hurt. Lost everything. For six days, without food or protection from the storms, he dragged himself on his belly across the barren grounds. He was as certain he would find that cache as he was that the sun would rise in the morning. The north had promised him that, a reward for his fighting courage.

"But you desecrated the north, broke its laws. Kenneth Poole was alive when he crawled to that place. He is dead now, dead, and you killed him. Do you know what I mean when I say that you will pay *exactly the cost of the goods?*"

There was no need for Ballard to answer. His face showed that he understood.

"Had I killed you as I wanted to when I first saw you," Homer continued evenly, "or just now as you prattled about your gratitude, it would have been personal revenge for the loss you have caused me. God knows I wanted to, and still want to; but I can't. I can't until the woman is safe. The north requires that first of all, and it will take the two of us to do it.

"But remember, Ballard, she alone will reach the ship. The moment she is safe I can act, can see that the north receives its due."

He stepped closer, his eyes blazing now.

"That is why we are going to get out," he declared. "Get out so that I can kill you."

AS THEY struggled back to camp, fighting the wind and deepening drifts, Homer found himself relieved of a great part of the strain he had endured. He wondered why he had not had his understanding with Ballard before. The mere statement of his case had produced a soothing effect. The spoken words seemed to have been a pledge to the memory of Kenneth Poole, a solemn avowal of his duty and of his determination to perform it.

Ballard was completely crushed by the astounding revelation that he was considered not only a thief, but a murderer, that he lived only because a woman was helpless, that he must go on without hope of anything except death.

But once in the shelter of the tent, warmed by the fire and in the presence of Theo, his spirit revived. Everything in life had come to him. He had learned to take, but never to pay. Nothing had ever prepared him for contrition or self-abasement.

The result was inevitable. Because he had had no intention of taking a life it was easier for him to convince himself that he was not a murderer. He reviewed the excuses he had made, added to them, strengthened them and repeated them over and over until, as he lay awake while the others were asleep, he came to consider himself the wretched, innocent plaything of fate.

The next day brought relief to all three. Although the lake was still rough and they were not able to travel far, the canoe was welcomed after the misery and bitterness of the tent. But in mid-afternoon a stiff wind from across the lake proclaimed that the north had taken only a tantalizing breathing spell and that with night another storm would come.

This time Homer was able to choose a camping place and prepare for the days of misery that would ensue. He found a small stream lined with willows and pitched the tent in the shelter of a sand-bank. When night came they were as comfortably fixed as the barren grounds ever permit.

In the four days and nights that followed they did not suffer the abject physical wretchedness of the first storm camp. Clothing and bedding were dry and there was enough fuel for cooking.

But the souls of all three were thrust into fresh torment. Inactivity and the irritation of intimate association in the close quarters of the little tent had their inevitable effect. Ballard's self-pity assumed a resentful quality. Theo sensed the strained relations between the two men, but was too miserable to care what it might be about. Homer, though conscious of the change in Ballard, was completely occupied by his anxiety over their delay.

It was this anxiety and a thorough realization of the desperate nature of their plight which led him to a step that immediately divided the group into warring factions. After breakfast Theo cut two extra pieces of bacon and began to fry them. Homer looked at her a moment, started to speak and then without explanation he piled all the food in the corner of the tent he occupied and sat down with his back to it.

"What does that mean?" Theo demanded angrily.

"It means," he answered calmly, "that we eat only twice a day so long as the storm lasts."

"Only twice!"

"Only twice, and reduced rations at that. We're getting close to the end. Hereafter I'll do all the cooking and apportion the meals."

"You haven't any right to do that!" Theo cried in sudden fury.

"I have the right of necessity."

"You mean you claim the right," she retorted.

"No, I have the right," Homer repeated, and he lifted a corner of his sleeping-bag and exposed the rifle that lay beneath.

He had acted only because he knew he must. He and Kenneth had cached less than a hundred and fifty pounds of flour and thirty pounds of bacon, just enough to last between failures in their meat supply when they made their dash for Fort Churchill.

Ballard and Theo had cut deeply into the food when he had found them. He himself had been starving and in the first few days had had to replace much burned tissue. Now, with so slight a bulwark between them and want, and with the prospect of further delays because of the weather, he knew how judiciously they must eat if they would make the food last, and he was prepared to enforce his decision.

After Theo's first outburst there was no further opposition. But as the meals were carefully measured, as the slim portions failed to satisfy a growing hunger, the tension of the situation increased. At first Theo had been able to accept her share with a distasteful contempt for Homer's action, but she soon began to watch his preparation of a meal with an eagerness she could not conceal.

Food and the desire for it became the dominant factor in the tent, poisoning their thoughts, breeding suspicion and hatred. When meal-time, came Theo and Ballard watched the apportionment with jealous eyes. Homer, determined not to be influenced by his hatred or bitterness, often slighted himself. He began to dread his task of dividing the food, and the more he saw of the brazen selfishness of the other two the more he thought of how he and Kenneth had passed through similar ordeals, each granting the other courage and fairness.

And now these two were sitting before him alive and warm because Ken was dead. They ate because he had starved. They waited for their portions with undisguised impatience where he had fought through six dauntless days to a famine death. Idle, useless, alien, they arrogantly demanded as their share the very life blood of a valiant son of the north itself.

At the end of the second meal on the fourth day he could stand it no longer. He arose without finishing his portion and rushed out into the storm. His entire body trembling, he strode off along the shore, gulping lungsful of the biting wind. He felt he could no longer endure sight of them unless he killed Ballard with his bare hands.

WHEN he had gone, Theo waited a moment, listening to his footsteps, and then she whispered:

"He gets worse every day. Why do you stand it?"

Ballard did not answer. Theo glanced at the small heap of supplies that remained. For a moment her eyes widened in horror and then her soft, mobile features set in cruel, hard lines.

"It isn't right!" she exclaimed fiercely. "That food is ours. It is life to us. And yet he calmly takes a share of it."

She waited a moment for her suggestion to sink in and then went on:

"Don't you see, Wayne? It's the third mouth. He eats as much as we do. He eats what we need to keep us alive. And why should we give it to him? We can do as well without him. He only sits here in a storm-bound tent and eats the food that may make the difference between life and death for us."

She leaned toward him, trying to look into his averted eyes. Because she did not know the reasons back of his hesitation she saw in him only a man not yet fired to action. A caressing tone crept into her voice.

"It isn't right," she whispered. "We owe it to ourselves. We are not responsible for his life. It is only you and I that count."

Her shoulder touched his. He glanced up. Her face was very close. He stared at her a moment, engulfed in the warm depths of her eyes, maddened by the hot breath from her red, parted lips.

"Theo! Theo!" he whispered as he crushed her to him. "We must live! We must get out, you and I!"

For a moment she clung to him passionately, returning his kisses, and then, with sudden strength, she tore herself free.

"You and I!" she repeated fiercely.

She was leaning close again, her eyes looking directly into his. The intoxication of the moment before was still upon him. He glimpsed what might be, a picture maddening in its allurement and promising reality through the courage of one moment.

"If you love me, Wayne," she whispered.

Ballard lunged forward and lifted Homer's sleeping-bag. The rifle, in its case, lay beneath. But even as his fingers touched it he heard Homer at the tent door, stamping the snow from his feet.

Instantly Ballard scrambled back beside Theo.

"You coward!" she whispered.

"There wasn't time," he answered. "Wait!"

The flaps were lifted and Homer entered.

THAT night the storm blew out. The tent no longer whipped and boomed in the wind. With the diminished crashing of the waves a great elemental force which had threatened them with destruction seemed to be slowly spending itself. The unusual stillness wakened Homer and he went outside to look at the star-filled sky.

"Get up!" he shouted. "We're starting in an hour."

For the first time there was a note of fellowship in his voice. It was prompted by the anticipation of escape from the poisonous atmosphere of inactivity and brooding hatred and by the hope which fair weather held.

"We'll get in a long day's travel before we camp again," he said as he kindled a fire and the others crowded into the welcome heat.

"But the waves!" Theo protested. "I can hear them!"

Homer did not answer. In the relief of activity he had ceased to resent her attitude, her constant absorption in petty discomforts and her lack of courage in the fight for life. He knew that the lessons of the north can come only in one way. The north does not instruct or inform. It only derides and defies. Men absorb its teachings. Weaklings go down before them in an orgy of self-pity.

Whether the woman learned or was broken, Homer did not care. He was concerned with the ultimate safety of her body, not of her soul. To him she was only an obstacle which must be eliminated before he could carry out his purpose.

It was this impersonality of attitude almost as much as the food he ate which had aroused Theo's deep resentment. He had robbed her, too, of the illusion of her love by making a mockery of the strength she believed she had discovered in Ballard. Had he done this as a rival there would have been the feminine thrill to the drama of the age-old triangle; but she could only hate the one for not desiring her as she hated the other for having failed her.

Thus when they resumed the journey there was no sympathy between them. These three, hemmed in by the vast, desolate north, bound together by danger, could find contact only through the rhythm of paddle strokes, were united only in the common desire for speed.

It was because of this desire that Theo for the first time added her effort to that of the men. Although she paddled steadily with no thought that it would influence Homer, her action had its effect.

"That's the mouth of the Kazan River just ahead and we've covered nearly thirty miles so far to-day," he told her as they ate lunch on shore at noon. "Another forty will take us to the river which flows into Chesterfield Inlet."

Both Theo and Ballard caught the unmistakable note of elation in his voice.

"And how far are we from Marble Island?" she asked.

"About three hundred, following the shore as we must."

"Three hundred!" she repeated in consternation, for the morning's toil had shown her the cost of thirty. "Ten times as far as we have come to-day!"

"Only we can't count it that way," Homer answered. "It has taken us ten days to come less than fifty."

His words brought a vision of future storm-bound camps and Theo, who had been brought by common activity so close to the threshold of companionship, was driven back to a frantic defense of the slender bags of food.

"Can you get game?" she asked fearfully.

"We can't hunt and travel," he answered, "and it's distance we want now."

"But when this is done," and she pointed to their supplies, "you can hunt?"

"And starve if we keep on in this direction. There is just one hope in going through Chesterfield Inlet and that is that we will meet a rescue party."

"You mean there is no game?"

"It's too uncertain along salt water at this time of year."

"But what did you expect to do before you found us?" she demanded scornfully. "You didn't know of a ship or rescue party."

Homer hesitated. Her question had torn him from the present and hurled him back to a September morning and a spot less than a mile away. He looked down the shore to the mouth of the Kazan, where he and Kenneth had parted, where he had last seen his friend alive.

His eyes swept inland along the banks of the stream up which he and Kenneth had planned to go. They could have faced that hazardous journey gladly and confidently. Now Kenneth was dead and this woman, who was alive only because he had starved, was claiming with selfish arrogance the price of Kenneth's life.

He was about to tell her just how little the food was hers when Ballard, who had been watching him closely, interrupted with a question:

"You intended to hunt your way out, didn't you, across the barren grounds?"

"You mean there is game if we go that way?" Theo asked.

"Of course," Ballard said. "Am I not right?"

"Game, yes," Homer replied.

"Can't you take us that way?" Theo demanded.

"No one can take another through the barren grounds," he answered contemptuously. "It's overland, nearly seven hundred miles. It means months on the way, dragging all your equipment. No fuel. Days without game. Blizzard after blizzard. Can you do it? No. Neither of you has the courage or the endurance."

Although he had answered his own question he glanced at Theo. She was huddled on the sand, staring at him without seeing him, aghast before the picture he had painted. She had been crushed by the bare prospect of the struggle and there came to him a vision of what the north would do to her soft body and softer soul.

Then hope flared in her as it always flares in the hearts of those who, lacking courage, must fight their battles with unarmed desire. She sprang to her feet.

"But we don't have to do that!" she cried. "The ship will wait. A boat must come for us. It may be only a day's travel from us now. Let's hurry!"

AS THEY shoved off from shore all three paddles bent under an added force, for Theo's statement had made vivid a possibility that had been in the mind of each. It had been one of the biggest factors in driving Homer to the utmost of his strength, and he welcomed the increase in speed that it compelled from the others.

But as the mouth of the Kazan River dropped behind and he knew that another day would take them into salt water and all that it meant at that time of year, doubts, which until then he had refused to acknowledge, compelled a hearing. He had wished to accept the possibility of a rescue boat and had counted upon it as earnestly as the other two, for he had always recoiled at the thought of making the inland journey with them.

Until then both the mouth of the Kazan and the possibility of a rescue boat had beckoned. Now one was behind and his sole hope must be placed on the other. He stopped paddling and laid his blade across the gunwales. "Look here," he began suddenly. "It's not too late to go the other way."

"You mean you think the ship has gone?"

Theo had read the thought behind his statement; for she, too, had been fighting fear.

"I mean that I think we are taking a long, long chance if we go on. You were to have arrived at Marble Island on September twentieth and the ship not later than the twenty-fifth. This is October seventh. That means Captain Longman has waited twelve days and that you're seventeen days overdue. There has been time for him to have sent a boat this far. If we don't meet one by tomorrow night it is hopeless to expect it."

"But they would leave a cache," Ballard protested.

"Without a doubt," Homer said. "But what would be in it? Plenty of gasoline for your wrecked motor-boat and enough food to get your entire party to Fort Churchill."

A cache alone was unacceptable to Theo, for behind it she saw the struggle Homer had outlined. To her hope lay only in the ship and a rescue boat.

"But they would never dare go on and leave us!" she cried. "I know the ship is waiting."

"You mean you hope it is," Homer corrected grimly.

She whirled upon him in sudden passion. She hated the country, she hated the conditions it imposed upon its victims, hated this man for stating them.

"Why do you care whether we hope or not?" she demanded. "What is our problem to you except the food we give you? You were starving when you found us. You have ridden in our canoe, slept in our tent, eaten our bacon and flour. And what have you done? Nothing! Only an hour ago you told us your rifle was useless, and yet you plan to come with us.

"If you think there is no hope, why don't you leave us? Go up this river, endure these hardships you tell us of. You said we didn't have the courage. Neither have you. No! You come with us, unasked and unwanted, and imperil the lives of a man and a woman who owe you nothing."

She paused, suddenly aware that Homer was not even listening to her. Crouching there in the stern, he was looking past her at Ballard and from his eyes there glared a hatred that chilled her. It was not the hot rage of sudden madness or the blinding fury of futility, but something so strong and so indomitable that it could come only from a supreme will to prevail.

She sat staring at him, drama and tragedy sweeping so closely that the hot breath of one and the chill fingers of the other brushed her cheek. Then Homer spoke.

"I've given you your choice," he said quietly, "and now I'm going with you. If you want to know why, let Ballard tell it."

He resumed paddling with a savage thrust of his blade. Twice before Theo had seen Homer look at Ballard in the same manner; yet for the first time the attitude of the men toward each other struck her as having a significance somber and unfathomed. Unrelated fragments of conversations, tense moments, Homer's savage fury and Ballard's unaccountable submission, all merged to produce a vague premonition of something sinister between them.

"Wayne!" she cried. "What does he——?"

She never finished her question. The canoe, propelled by Homer's powerful thrusts, slipped out to the end of a long, narrow point and in that instant she lost all interest in what lay between the two men. Half a mile ahead a boat was coming toward them under sail. She stared incredulously and then held out her hands.

"Look! Look!" she cried. "They've come! They've come!"

At a time when the last glimmer of hope had been fading it seemed the more miraculous. She became hysterical with delight. She wanted to sing, to laugh and to dance, and then, because the canoe did not permit activity, she threw herself forward upon the sleeping robes and wept convulsively.

So absorbed was Theo by her own emotions she did not see the drama that was being enacted in the canoe. Ballard had turned to face the others, had found Homer looking at him, and instantly he had read his fate. For with his first sight of the sail Homer had realized what his course must be.

Until that moment he had been in the north, of it, subject to its laws. It was his world, the world he knew, one in which he was confident of his judgment and of his duties.

The boat was bringing another world, the world of the sea, governed by the laws of the sea and by the men of the sea. They were written laws, strict but strange, and they were administered by men who knew nothing of the north. If Kenneth Poole were to be avenged, it must be now before the law of the north gave way to the law of the sea.

Instantly he turned the canoe toward the point they had just passed. Ballard sensed his intention and thrust his own paddle into the water. His efforts had all the intensity of despair and they swung the bow off. He did not hope to make progress against Homer's paddling, but every ounce of strength in his terrified body was devoted to equalizing Homer's efforts until the boat should reach them.

He was succeeding and Homer, intent only on one thing, forgot the safety of the woman who shared the canoe with them. He laid aside his paddle, grasped the gunwales and started forward.

"I'm coming, Ballard," he shouted.

His exclamation aroused Theo. She looked up and the fear of what she saw straightened her in the path of Homer's lunge and blocked him.

"Look!" she cried. "They're leaving us!"

So intent was Homer on reaching his victim her cry held no significance for him. She beat with her small fists upon his chest and shouted in his face.

"Stop them! Stop them! They're leaving us!"

Homer glanced over his shoulder. The boat had been coming straight toward them, fair before the breeze. Now it had veered off and, close hauled, was making for the open lake.

For a moment he stared in amazement. Then he saw the occupants, rowing as if in a frenzy of fear, and recognized, not a ship's boat, but a York boat, native of rivers and lakes many hundred miles to the south. Because he was of the north and knew its people, what was only tragic desertion for the others became instantly plain to him.

"They're Eskimos!" he cried. "That boat is not from the ship!"

HOMER threw off his rage and his desire to slay as if they had been two garments. He stood up in the canoe, stretched both hands above his head and shouted "*Kab-lu-na! Kab-lu-na!*" as loudly as he could.

Theo and Ballard had picked up their paddles and were plying them in frantic pursuit.

"Keep quiet!" Homer commanded. "They believe we are Indians and if they think we're chasing them they'll cross the lake. They'll be down wind in a minute and can hear me."

He shouted "white man" in the Eskimo language again and again, holding his arms straight up.

"They've stopped rowing!" Theo cried. "They've heard you."

Homer saw some one release the sail. It flapped in the wind, the boat swung around and the natives gathered in a group in the middle.

"Take it easy," Homer said as he knelt down and began to paddle. "They may stampede again if they see us hurry."

When the canoe was a hundred yards from the boat he told them to stop paddling and again he stood up to assure the Eskimos that he was a *kab-lu-na*.

"It's Ko-pa-nu-ak and his people!" he exclaimed. "I saw them down the inlet last Spring."

The canoe pushed up alongside the York boat. The natives had recognized Homer and were awaiting him with shy grins and dancing, friendly eyes. There were two men, two women and four children in the party. As Homer grasped the gunwale and Theo looked into the larger craft she turned to him in consternation.

"They have nothing!" she gasped. "No food! Nothing!"

"They may have a camp near here," Homer answered. "Wait until I talk to them."

He was eager to learn if the Eskimos had seen a searching party or a cache, but in the face of the childish interest of the natives he could not make much headway. One of them had already discovered Theo's sex and before the wonder of this first white woman to visit their country they became wildly articulate. It was a minute before Ko-pa-nu-ak could make himself heard.

"You go up 'the wooded river' with one man and you come out with another and with a woman," he said to Homer.

In a low voice Homer explained that Kenneth Poole had died and that these two were the sole survivors of a party that had met disaster at the western end of the lake.

Tragedy is ever a bedfellow of the Eskimos, but familiarity with it has never dulled their sympathy. They ceased talking and their flat, brown faces were expressive of genunie compassion.

"So the big, happy white man has died," Ko-pa-nu-ak said. "We are sorry."

It was a sincere expression of condolence, and when Theo broke in upon it with an impatient question about the ship Homer turned upon her in sudden wrath.

"I don't know," he said. "I haven't asked them."

The second Eskimo had crowded forward upon hearing of the wreck of the Spencer expedition.

"We saw a boat, one with a sail, in the salt water four days ago," he volunteered.

"Which way was it going?" Homer asked quickly.

The man pointed toward the east.

"What does he say?" Theo demanded when she saw the gesture.

"That they saw a boat with a sail four days ago and that it was going eastward."

"Eastward!" she cried. "Not away from us! Not back to the ship!"

"That's what he said," Homer answered.

"If you'll keep quiet I'll try to learn something more."

But when he turned back to the Eskimos he found them talking so earnestly and so volubly among themselves it was impossible for him to interrupt or to understand what they said.

"Ask them more about the boat," Theo persisted.

"And a cache," Ballard added. "Did they see one? For God's sake, ask them!"

Their impatience brought no sympathy from Homer. In the excited chatter of the natives he had sensed a story of unusual importance and one, too, which would have a bearing on the fate of the three in the canoe. At last Ko-pa-nu-ak turned to him, his manner and that of the others showing he had been delegated as spokesman.

THE story came slowly, with all the unnecessary details of the expedition from its inception. Ko-pa-nu-ak and his cousin, with their wives and children, had gone down to Fort Churchill in the summer. It was their first journey to a trading-post from their home up the Kazan river, but they had been anxious to see white men, of whom they had heard, and to get some of the white man's trade goods.

They had reached Fort Churchill after great effort, but they were glad they had come, for a trader had been kind to them, had given them wonderful things in exchange for their furs and had even presented them with this big boat that sailed the salt water if they would promise to return the next year with more fur and with that of their people.

But on the journey home misfortune had dogged them continually. They knew little of the salt water as their ancestors had left it nearly a century before to live in the interior where caribou were plentiful. The big boat was unwieldy, the tide often left them stranded and they had lost much time going inland to hunt. Now they were a long way from home, winter had come and they had made no provision for it. Their only hope lay in the fellow members of their band who killed caribou at the crossing on the upper Kazan each fall.

"But the boat you saw on the salt water?" Homer interrupted. "Did you see it again?"

"No, though we remained in the place two days. We saw the sail far off, going toward the east. It did not come back."

"Wait," said Homer as he turned to his companions.

"There is no doubt about the boat having gone back to the ship," he told them.

"But they can help us catch it!" Theo cried.

"It is too late. Besides, these people are starving. They are a long way from home and their only hope is to reach their band on the upper Kazan."

"But get them to turn back!" she persisted. "They must! They have a sail. If we can't catch the ship they can take us to Fort Churchill."

"They have spent half the summer and all fall coming from Churchill and have nearly starved doing it."

"But tell them we will pay well," she urged. "Anything they ask. Five thousand dollars. Ten thousand."

"What does a dollar mean to an Eskimo?"

"You can tell them it means comfort for the rest of their lives."

"And what do they know about comfort? They've never had it. Just now they are prompted by the one motive that prompts all Eskimos from the day they are born until they die—the imperative need of food—and we can't divert them."

"But the cache!" Ballard insisted. "Did they see it? Tell them there is one and that we will share it with them."

As he turned to put the question Homer saw that he had interrupted the Eskimos before they had reached the important part in their story. He sensed, too, from their embarrassment that what they wished to tell was connected in some way with himself and his companions.

"Did you see anything which the boat with the sail had left on the shore?" he asked.

They looked anxiously at one another.

"I know you did not take it," Homer continued. "That is not the reason I asked. Besides, I can see there is nothing in your boat. But we have little and if we do not find the cache we will die."

The words which he had meant to be reassuring only added to the agitation of the natives. He did not believe they had committed any depredations, for the law of the cache was sacred with them, but he could see that their embarrassment was connected in some way with his question.

"I am your friend," he said.

His simple profession of good will loosened their tongues. Ko-pa-nu-ak burst forth in a swift stream of explanation, but it was so punctuated by the comments of the others it was some time before Homer gathered the following story:

"We came to the southern of the two rivers that flow from this lake two days after seeing the boat with the sail and on the shore we saw a pile of things that were not rock. We landed and went to it and found many white man's goods, some like those we had seen at Fort Churchill and some we had never seen before. There were goods in bags and goods in boxes of wood and others in boxes of iron.

"We looked at everything, but we did not touch them and we were going away when my cousin, An-nu-kee, said that we had no matches, those we had from Fort Churchill being no good because the water touched them. I said they were not ours, but he said it would be all right to take one box if we left a pair of shoes in exchange.

"We talked of it for some time and at last we thought that if there were many boxes of matches the owners would not care if we took one and left shoes.

"There were many of the iron boxes, all piled up, and the other boxes and bags piled near them. We had to move some and one of the iron boxes fell upon a rock and water began to run out of it. We thought it was water, for it looked like water, but it smelled badly and it was not fit to drink. We were sorry we broke the box. The water ran out among the other bags and boxes and over the rocks, but we did not think it could be of any use.

"An-nu-kee found many boxes of matches and he took one and put the pair of shoes in its place. We piled all the boxes back and covered them with the cloth as it had been and then An-nu-kee filled the pipe the trader had given him and lit a match.

"At once everything was on fire. The water burned. The rocks burned. Fire was like water and ran across the ground. It chased us, though we ran fast, and some of us were burned. We got into our boat and rowed away and for a long time after we could look back and see the fire and the black smoke.

"I am very sorry that the *kab-lu-na's* food was burned, but it was not our fault. The white man who put the things there should not have left the evil-smelling water. Or perhaps evil spirits found the cache before we did and changed the water into fire. We do not know. We are only sorry."

Ko-pa-nu-ak stopped and stood as if waiting for condemnation or forgiveness, but Homer had already forgotten the Eskimos and the destruction of the cache.

WHEN he had urged them to tell the story he had expected to learn that they had taken a small amount of food. Even when Ko-pa-nu-ak had told of the broken case of gasoline he had not been prepared.

But when with halting, terrified words the native described the swift river of fire, Homer not only realized in a flash what he and his companions faced, but he stood in sudden awe and wonder before this poetic nature of the north's dispensation of justice and he recognized the insignificance of his own pitiful attempt of an hour before. He had once pronounced himself a god, god of the north, but his fumbling mortal fingers had groped in vain for the boreal scepter.

Theo and Ballard were watching him with fear-widened eyes. They had not been able to understand a word, but they had sensed disaster.

"What is it?" Theo whispered.

Homer did not seem to hear. He was staring past her at Ballard.

There was nothing superstitious or fanciful about Homer Bishop, but he had been racked by the stress of emotion and it was not the future but the past which held him silent. Incidents which at any other time he would have considered unrelated suddenly entwined and became logical, connected parts of a great, significant scheme of things.

To him at that moment there stretched from Kenneth Poole's cramped, lifeless body to the match in the awkward hands of a savage a chain of ominous, inevitable events. It was as though a law of life had suddenly stood out startlingly and tragically clear in terms of human expiation.

"Ballard," he said solemnly, "I have been presumptuous. The north is taking care of its own."

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SO IMPRESSED was Theo by the disaster as she had sensed it in the manner of the Eskimos and in Homer's reception of the story that she was unaware that again she was on the verge of learning what lay between the two men. Her sole interest was in the safety of her own body.

"What has happened?" she demanded.

For a moment Homer hesitated. Daily he had felt more bitterly resentful of her cost to him. Each time that she had burst forth in a childish tempest because of the discomforts of her life he had told himself she was not worth the sacrifice he was making for her. So thoroughly had this feeling possessed him that he had no compassion because of what she faced, but he did shrink from the thought of the shadow of a soul his story would leave her.

Then because it had to be told he plunged into an account of what had happened to the cache left by the rescue boat.

"There you have it," he concluded. "Winter has come. We're only a hundred and fifty miles south of the Arctic Circle. Seven hundred from the nearest white man or hope of safety."

More petrified than daunted, his two companions stared at him. Then Theo gave way. Crouching in the bottom of the canoe, she abandoned herself to hysterical weeping.

Ballard took the full blow, but fought his way back to a semblance of courage.

"But there is the Kazan!" he exclaimed.

Again Homer hesitated. That noon he had told them they did not have the courage or the endurance to make the winter journey across the barren grounds and he had seen them confirm his appraisal by their terrified retreat before his picture of desolation and despair.

He knew what lay ahead, how death would oppose them through each of the seven hundred miles. It was a terrific task for two strong men, men who were experienced and undaunted, while these two had failed time and again to stand toe to toe with death.

He knew they would fail again. He was appalled by the task they imposed upon him. And yet in that moment, following so quickly upon his renunciation of the godship of the north, the god in him assumed its unconscious place and accepted the responsibility.

Vain as he knew the task would be, he began stubbornly to make of their desire to live an effort to survive. Solemnly and intending to tell only the truth, but all of it, he outlined the situation. He had known the barren grounds in winter and what they did to a man's soul as well as to his body and he painted a picture of starvation and bitter cold, of solitude and crushing loneliness, of the vastness of the land and its appalling emptiness, of the supreme effort necessary to gain a mile with another mile the sole reward.

He gave them no hope that he himself did not have. He told what they might expect, both of the best and of the worst. He related with a terrible simplicity the stories of others who had fought the north and lost. They were only a little way south of the spot where the last of Sir John Franklin's men had starved by scores. To the east two shiploads of explorers had made the white dome of Marble Island an everlasting monument to their horrible, lingering deaths.

Throughout his description the dominant note was food. Starvation had laid its hand upon Franklin's men, had mowed down those on Marble Island two hundred years before. Even now the grim specter was clutching at the hearts of the Eskimos in the York boat.

He had no intention of magnifying the horror of it. He told it, rather, as a man who has thrilled to the wonderful story the nearer north has to tell, a story that lacks some of the glamour of the arctic but none of its heroism or dogged courage. And in the telling of it he tried to show them the nature of the man who can survive, to instill perhaps some of the spirit of the old conquerors of the north.

But so far as Ballard and Theo were concerned he talked only of food, of its scarcity, of its importance, of the horrors that accompany the lack of it—the heroism of those who have fought the north and won, the greater courage of those who have fought and lost, escaped these two. They felt no thrill to the fight, had no eagerness for the struggle.

Food became the most important thing in their lives. Though they had faced death before, though they had watched their supply diminish, there always had been hope. Their faith in men from the ship buoyed them up. They had expected rescue at any moment.

Now they saw death peering at them over the meager heap of flour and pork. They saw no chance to escape its clutching fingers. The struggle Homer had outlined was more appalling than death itself and when he finished speaking they were ready to admit defeat before they had struck a single blow.

Crushed and beaten, they sat in the canoe and stared at the empty, desolate lake and at the emptier and more desolate land behind it. Homer, watching their faces, read their naked thoughts and he knew that again the north had found its strongest ally in the selfishness of its victims.

For the philosophy of the north is paradoxical. He whose one concern is his body may lose it; and he whose spirit rises free and undaunted above physical hardships and fights on into the very face of death may gain not only life itself, but the greater glory of having compelled life.

Homer hesitated in the face of the dead weight he must carry, and then because he knew that he must struggle on with it he turned to the definite details of the present.

"It is imperative that we get up the Kazan as quickly as possible," he said. "It's more than two hundred miles to the Eskimo camp above Yath-kyed lake and the river may freeze over at any time.

"Once at the camp we can get winter clothing and an outfit. But we won't get there unless we hurry. We'll go ashore now, cook enough for several days and then get into the Eskimos' boat. In that way we can travel night and day until the ice or rapids stop us."

"Why travel with the Eskimos?" Theo protested.

"It's the best way. We can take turns sleeping and not miss an hour of progress."

"But our food!"

"We'll share it with them, of course."

Until then his intention seemed incredible, but the bare statement drove her into a passion.

"Feed these savages!" she cried. "Share what little we have with them! You can't! You can't rob us!"

She threw herself upon the pack of flour and pork, clutching it to her and glaring defiantly at Homer.

"You have forced yourself upon us," she continued. "You have demanded your share; but you can't take it for these people."

It was more than Homer could endure.

"But the kiddies," he persisted. "They're crying from hunger now."

"NEVER! Never!" she shrieked. "You've no right to ask it! This is ours. We brought it into the country. We need it to get out. We won't give it up."

She turned suddenly to Ballard.

"Wayne, why don't you say something?" she demanded. "Why don't you let him know he can't have it? These ignorant savages destroyed the supplies that were left for us. They are no better than thieves. If we die, they will be our murderers. And yet he asks us to feed them. We won't! We won't! Tell him we won't!"

Ballard, his face white and drawn, had been staring at her. When she finished he roused himself.

"It isn't right," he began in an attempt to be forceful. "We haven't much and, as Theo——"

"Stop!" Homer commanded hoarsely. "Stop!"

Ballard crumpled under the deadliness of his glance and instantly Theo's fury was diverted.

"You coward!" she shrieked. "You yellow, yellow, yellow cur! I hate you! I hate you! You call yourself a man and——"

Ballard straightened in his seat like a flash.

"You cat!" he roared. "You can't say that to me! This isn't our food. It never was. I stole it. Stole it for you. It was his. But I took it. All of it. Because you were starving.

"I lied about it because I thought you would feel better. I stole for you and I lied for you. I stole this canoe and the tent and everything we have. If you hadn't been so wrapped up in your own comfort, you would have guessed. You would have known when he came, from the way he acted.

"But you didn't care. You didn't think of anything except that soft body of yours. You purred when the food came and now you spit when you see it slipping."

The unexpectedness and the brutality of the attack stunned Theo for a moment. Then she saw the significance of all the events which had mystified her and realized the contemptible part she must have played in the eyes of the owner of the cache. Another might have been humbled, but she felt only tricked and cheated, felt that she had been made despicable by the situation rather than by any quality in her own nature.

"You didn't steal for me!" she cried furiously. "You stole to make yourself a hero in my eyes. And now because you have failed you try to drag me down in your own humiliation. Why didn't you tell me the truth when you came back? Instead you remained silent because I admired you for a strength you never had."

She turned to Homer.

"And you!" she exclaimed. "You might have told me! You had the opportunity. Time and again. Why didn't you say the food was yours?"

"It wasn't mine," Homer answered quietly. "It wasn't mine," he repeated as she stared at him blankly. In fresh fury she whirled upon Ballard.

"You lied!" she cried. "Lied to humble me!"

"I did not lie to you!" Ballard roared back. "The food was his, his and another man's. The other man died because I took it. He was hurt and he starved to death. You are alive now because he is dead. Because I robbed him. Robbed him for you.

"And now you turn on me. I stole for you. I lied for you. And don't you see? I killed a man for you. And what do I get? Scratches! Cat's scratches! Scratches from you and a bullet from him. The only reason I'm living now is because he thinks I can help get you out.

"And then what? I pay for that food you have been boasting of. I give my life because I tried to save yours. Because I'd do anything for you. Because—because—God help me—because I loved you, Theo. Because I love you yet, you—you damned cat!"

JOVE and Buddha, Thor and Baal, Zeus and Isis, all were pigmies beside Food, the great god of the North. Their authority was delegated or divided, and lesser gods and goddesses rose to prominence or gained favor. In the north Food is alone and supreme, exacting and inexorable, grinding, withering and inflexible, never showing mercy or permitting lesser deities within the borders of its domain.

Night and day it alone blazes in the heavens and no one can ever forget or disregard its domination. White men have defied it and died. Others have obeyed implicitly, and some of them have been permitted to go free. The great god's own particular children, the Eskimos, have survived but only because they have remained humble and loyal and willing to make the terrible sacrifices their ruthless deity ordains.

A hundred years ago a band of Eskimos sought to escape from the pitiless sway of their sole tyrant. For centuries they and their ancestors had been journeying far south from the salt water to gather wood for their sleds and harpoon shafts, and on the great, desolate plains they had seen caribou passing in herds that carpeted the earth.

They desired the caribou and they longed to live in a country where meat was so plentiful but they feared the roving bands of Indians and quickly gathered their wood and fled back to the Arctic sea and the endless nightmare of starvation.

Unknown to the Eskimos white men established trading posts far to the south and drew the Indians from the barren grounds. The little band of wood gatherers from the Arctic found that signs of their foes were disappearing. Years went by and there were no evidences of the southern savages along the northern rivers. At last the Eskimos risked a return of the Indians and defied their god.

The deity saw them and smiled, a diabolically cruel smile. He did not stop them. He let them remain on the bank of a large stream where, in a frenzy of slaughter, they speared deer by the hundred as they swam across. They piled the carcasses in huge pyramids to freeze. They reveled in the abundance of food. They laughed at the coming of winter.

For the first time in their lives they would not have to sit, half frozen, beside a seal hole waiting for the seal that often did not come. They would not have to risk their lives attacking a polar bear. They would not waken in the morning to the heartrending cries of starving children.

And then they learned why the great god of the north had smiled. They had food but no fuel. They built their snow houses, those cozy shelters they had always known on the Arctic sea, but without seal-oil lamps the igloos were only ice tombs.

They made tents of the skins of the caribou and in them they huddled together through the long winter. Dark, cheerless, inconceivably frigid, these topeks shielded them only from the full blast of the barren ground gales. The still, quiet, deadly cold of the North had free ingress. A few made sooty, evil-smelling torches of moss and tallow, for the sun shone only a short time at noon, but the flickering lights did little more than make their wretchedness more vivid.

On the Arctic sea they had moved their homes with the hunting. New walls and beds and floors of clean, fresh snow had been frequent. Here they remained for nine months crowded in the same tents on the same spots. Bones and refuse littered the floor. The filth became indescribable.

Except to go to the huge pyramids of caribou the people seldom left the tents. Because there was no hunting or traveling their bodies became as lethargic as their minds. Through the greater part oft he winter they lay huddled together, gorging on frozen fish and meat, sleeping, drugged by sloth.

Yet they remained. Year after year they and their children continued to live at the spot where the caribou crossed by the hundred thousand. They recalled the warm, cheerful igloos in which they had been born, but they recalled far more vividly the hunger and privation and the deaths when the seals had failed them, and willingly they remained beside the great mounds of caribou. They accepted the wretchedness the great god Food had decreed, and groveled the more faithfully at his feet.

IT WAS from this camp on the Kazan River, four miles above Yath-kyed lake, that Homer Bishop, Theo Spencer and Wayne Ballard started in the starlight of an early morning in the last week of November.

They had a sled on which were lashed two hundred and fifty pounds of caribou, the sleeping-robes, tent, stove and ammunition. Homer and Ballard dragged the sled, each trace attached to a broad band passing across the back of the neck and under the arms. Theo walked behind.

All three were clad wholly in deerskin, baggy trousers, loose, long shirts unopened at the neck and with great enveloping hoods attached, and shoes, thick and clumsy, that came nearly to the knee.

Before them lay two hundred miles of that terrible white desert of the] north and beyond that two hundred more in the northern fringe of timber, four hundred miles of tugging at the traces, of cheerless camps, of faces scorched by the cold, of tortured bodies and despairing hearts, of the grinding, crushing, numbing misery of the north.

For some unknown reason the caribou had crossed the Kazan in comparatively small numbers that year. The Eskimos had been able to pile up little more than half of the usual supply, and even Theo and Ballard after a day in the camp could see that it would not last all of them through the long winter. The natives did not fail in cordiality, but Homer immediately began preparations for going on.

It was necessary for him to employ his knowledge of the Eskimos and of the country to the utmost to get the outfit ready. There were a few things he and Kenneth Poole had brought for trading in such an emergency, simple and inexpensive but of great value in the eyes of the natives. Yet they did not cover all, and a week of effort was required to induce one of the men to part with his sled in return for certain goods to be left for him at Fort Churchill.

Homer selected the meat with care, boning it and taking only those parts which had streaks of fat in them. The canoe purchased the entire supply but because it had been left far down the Kazan River where ice had overtaken them more time was necessary in making the trade. Credit or deferred payment of any sort was something wholly without the experience of the Eskimos.

The preparation for the journey was a task which only Homer of the three could have accomplished. His success gave him a sense of power and consequent elation which mitigated that irritation which the resumption of close relations with these two would otherwise have brought. During the six weeks with the natives, both in the hazardous journey up the Kazan and in the camp, he had been freed of that contact which had been so galling.

Now, elated and confident, his energies diverted to constant and strenuous physical exertion, he was able to reenter a situation which had been rapidly becoming unbearable. His rage and desire for vengeance were as great, but he had made of himself an impersonal instrument of his purpose.

As he accepted the situation, so he accepted the toil and hardships. For twelve hours each day he gave himself wholly to his task. From early morning until night his toes were digging into the hard surface of the snow and his shoulders were straining against the collar.

But to Theo and Ballard, unaccustomed to winter travel, the journey was nothing less than an unvarying nightmare of drudgery. The sun rose at ten o'clock and set at two. They were aroused by their implacable taskmaster while it was still dark and they were not permitted to cease toiling until long after the stars were out.

Each night they crawled into their sleeping bags the moment the sled stopped, gnawed at a chunk of frozen meat and dropped off to sleep. Each morning they rose and plodded on, silent and sullen.

Then, as they put the miles behind them, they began to sense a change in Homer's attitude. It was now two months since he had found Kenneth's body and nearly as long since he had looked at Ballard with that overmastering desire to kill.

The great, venomous emotion of hate, like that of fear, can never be sustained of itself. Its very intensity burns away its supports and this process had been occurring unconsciously with Homer. Where once the exaction of revenge had been the primary thought in his life, now the desire for it flared only occasionally. He was still dedicated to his purpose, but the fire of it was banked by the continual need of intense physical effort.

Furthermore, one of the elements of their communal life which had kept him irritated constantly was no longer present. At first he had suffered exquisite torture when he watched them eat the food for which Kenneth had died. It had been a daily reminder of the revenge which must be postponed. But the last of the flour and pork had been consumed long before. They were living on food won by Homer's efforts and, without his realizing it, that fact was bringing about a change in his attitude.

That and success. He was exhilarated constantly by the knowledge of personal achievement. In the face of great odds and the disaster of the burned cache, with the barren grounds to conquer, with the load of a useless woman and an inexperienced man, he was winning.

In the past when he had been unincumbered he had thrilled to the challenge of the white desert. Now he thrilled the more because his burden brought him the exultation of success in an unequal struggle. Something of the Homer of old returned. He welcomed the desolation, the darkness and the privation because he conquered them. And because he conquered them, not only for himself but for these two, he became less inaccessible in spirit.

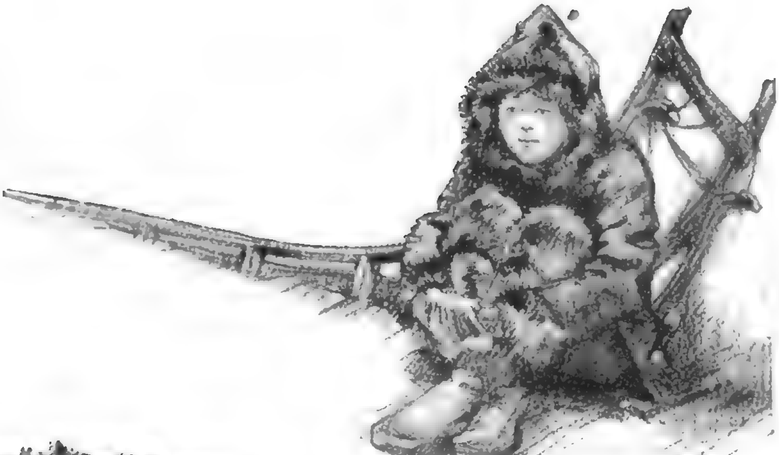
THEO felt this and immediately she began to revive, not only because she was less absorbed in her own physical distress as she became accustomed to the toil and hardship, but because she craved escape from an overpowering loneliness. Since their meeting with the Eskimos on Baker Lake she had been shut off from her companions by the impersonal attitude and absorption of one and by the humiliation and resentment of the other. For the first time in her life she had been completely ignored.

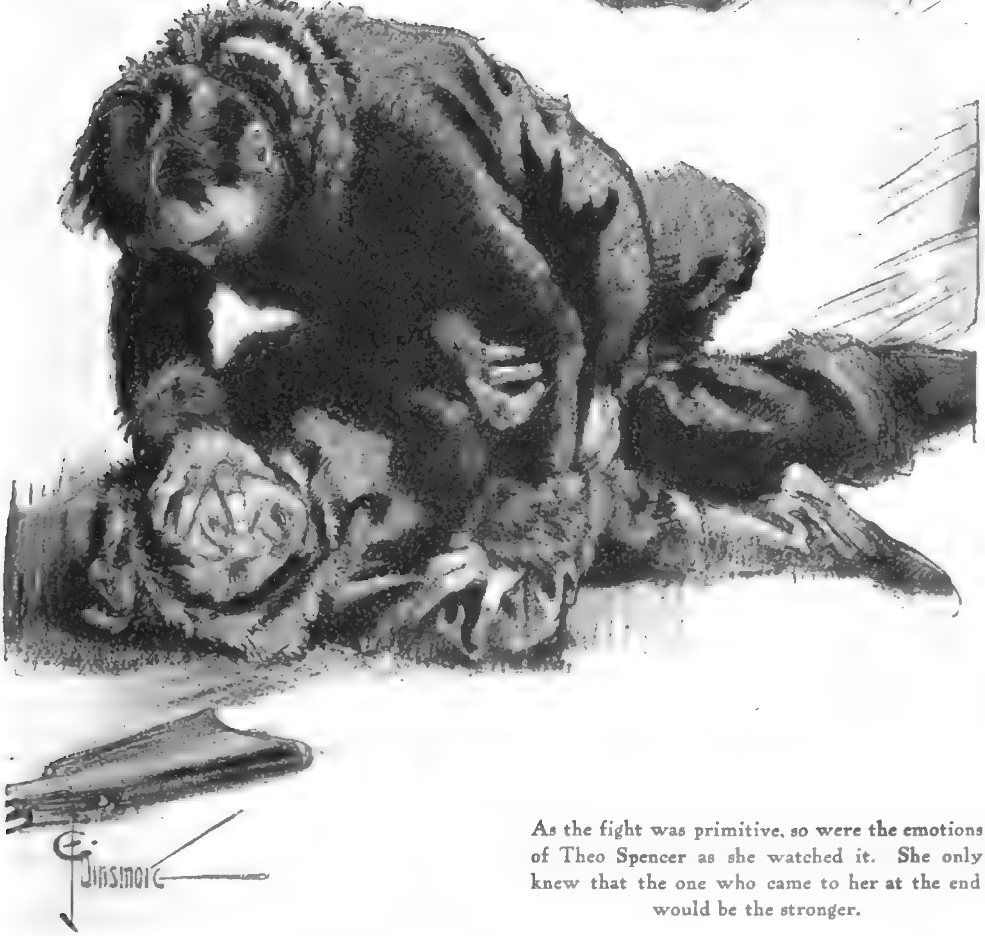
Consciously she began to enlarge the small hole she found in the barrier that had always stood between her and Homer. And because she was mistress of the most universal of the arts, her first attack was the more deceiving because it was the more open and unaffected.

In the half-darkness near the end of a long days' march they found a few small willows scattered along a stream. The men, eager for their first fire, separated to gather them. Theo accompanied Homer and worked beside him. When they had broken off the last stick and he had turned back toward the sled she stood before him.

"I have always wanted to tell you how sorry I am about that cache," she began at once. "I would rather have died than have won life that way. But now nothing can be altered and I can only say that I am sorry."

A woman's eyes shining in the starlight and a half-repressed sob, the soft allure of beauty penitent, can perform miracles. They accomplished now what Homer would never have believed possible; for under the spell of them that other picture of a fighting, snarling, spitting cat refusing food to starving Eskimo children began to fade. Theo saw and with the skill life had taught her she spun another web of soft illusion.





As the fight was primitive, so were the emotions of Theo Spencer as she watched it. She only knew that the one who came to her at the end would be the stronger.

"There are many things which strong men know instinctively," she continued gravely. "We, the weaker ones, must learn them in experiences such as these."

The next morning she was up at Homer's first call and before the sled was packed she had attached a thong to his trace. When they started she pulled beside him and quietly and unassumingly she toiled throughout the day. She accomplished only a little in lightening the load, but she wrought a great change in Homer himself.

There is a dream which comes to all men who live in the wilderness, that of a mate battling side by side with them against the environment. It grows from the ages-old desire to share life. It has made some men accept a woman of a primitive race because her life has taught her courage and it has kept others exalted, waiting for the mate who may never come.

Homer Bishop was such a one. Now as Theo looked at him with swift, bright glances from beneath her fur-rimmed parka hood, as she toiled with him and her shoulder brushed his, or, when the sled caught and her soft body was drawn close by the jerk on the traces, his imagination began to sketch a picture of what he had believed could never be.

Theo's first attempts had been premeditated and she had cleverly gauged her blows in battering down his contempt for her. But as the days of this new relationship passed she reacted to a basic need. She still plied her trade with skill and cunning, but she did so not only to achieve ascendency over an unconquered man, but to win, as every primitive woman has had to win, her assurance of protection and sustenance through the domination of the stronger male.

And because Homer sensed that primitive situation and felt that he was chosen rightfully, by virtue of his strength, he, too, was caught in the vortex of raw passions and emotions and thrilled to the triumph of being first.

The effect was unavoidable, not only upon Homer, but upon Theo and Ballard. These three were in a world of their own, in a great, desolate, crushing silence that hemmed them in on all sides, that forced them together not only in self-protection and common endeavor, but through the human desire of the individual to have his or her place in the world no matter what that world may be.

The fact that their world was dreary, small and transient and that conditions were of the simplest in no way altered the basic facts. Sex and food, strength and weakness, fear and courage, the desire for survival and something more—all the instinctive and inherent qualities, all the subtle, unconscious forces that move the world, were present in that little universe of three.

And because that universe was small, because conditions were simple and so extremely primitive, the fundamental human actions and reactions were unreserved, unmistakable and brutally bare. The two men and the woman were hurled back through the ages, stripped of the gain of thousands of years. Even the cause of Homer's hate became dim. In the restricted cycle of their existence there was room in the forefront only for the two great elemental motives of all human action: food and sex. Life and the continuance of life, the bare physical phenomena of existence, was completely dominant.

Yet they never saw a change and never realized that they had reverted. Theo Spencer, though possessed of a fortune, was only a skin-clad woman of the caves governed solely by an innate impulse to subject herself to the man most competent to provide more skins and to guard her from hunger and wild beasts.

Homer Bishop, predominantly successful, unterrified by the ogres of their world, possessed of skill and courage and inured to the hard things with which his life had been filled, was readily susceptible to the soft allure of the woman. Her avowed dependence flattered him. The fact that Ballard, in that last flare when they had first met the Eskimos, had made known his own desire served only to sweeten the conquest.

Ballard was forced into the one remaining position. He had strength, but lacked the necessary skill. He had been in the ascendent and he had lost. Day after day he could do nothing but watch Theo. Because he was as human as the others, as greatly swayed by all the inherent instincts and desires, only bitterness and hatred were left to him.

It was thus that they toiled on across the great white plain. Each step was a battle for life. All three fought doggedly and determinedly and yet, because man demands something more of life than the living, the men were preparing also for the battle for the woman, even as she made known her preference.

LESS than a week after they left the Eskimo camp the dread specter of hunger appeared on the horizon. Homer had hoped to find game as they traveled and to keep the selected, fatter meat for storm-bound camps. Each morning he had placed the rifle on top of the load so that he could get at it quickly, but each night he had taken it off without having added an ounce to the supply which was diminishing so rapidly.

The others knew and understood what it meant, though all three had avoided the subject. But as they packed up on the morning of the eighth day Theo saw that one of the two skin bags was empty.

"How many more days will the food last?" she asked anxiously.

"As many as we've come," Homer answered. "But we'll find deer before then."

In the long dawn all three maintained a more vigilant search than before. Daylight came and at last Homer, because his eyes were better trained for the task, saw the caribou. He halted suddenly and when the others made out the distant animals their eyes lighted with that hungry flame peculiar to all people who live by the chase.

But Homer had already turned to a study of the threatening sky. Theo, who had been keenly sensitive to his every thought, watched his face anxiously for a moment.

"Is it the storm?" she asked. "Is there danger of it coming before you can get back?"

"Every chance," he answered. "But I've got to take it."

"Don't!" she whispered. "Don't risk it!"

"I've got to," he answered steadily. "It might be days before we see others."

As he spoke he took his rifle from the lashings, selected a chunk of frozen meat and slung his sleeping bag from his shoulders.

"Ballard," he said, "see that low ridge over there where the river cuts through? You two take the sled and make camp at the base of the steep bank on the east side so that I can find you. I don't know how long it will take me, for the deer will start moving when the storm strikes them. And put up the tent. We're in for some bad weather."

He had spoken briskly, but when he turned to Theo he was suddenly embarrassed by the look of expectation in her eyes.

"Good-by," he said awkwardly, and started off.

The moment he turned away Theo regretted her indecision. She took a step after him and a little cry escaped her. But Homer had broken into a quick trot across the hard, frozen surface of the snow and she was recalled from her intention by the sneering face of Ballard. "Too bad that I can't be the one to go," he said bitterly.

WITHOUT answering, she tugged at her trace and they started toward the river. The wind increased. A few flakes of snow fell. Then, when they were still half a mile from the stream, the storm struck, swirling and driving, blinding and buffeting. Homer and the deer, the great white plain and the river, all disappeared behind the gray, smothering curtain.

Ballard caught his bearings with the last glimpse of his objective and plunged steadily forward, guided by the wind and by what sense of direction he could retain. As Theo pulled beside him her head was turned toward the west and she sought in vain to catch a glimpse of Homer as he raced with the storm to reach the deer.

But the barren grounds were exacting their usurer's interest for the fair weather of the last week. The wind swept the sledge sideways. It forced entrance into hoods and sleeves, and it seared when it touched the skin. The crystal-hard particles of snow, driven across the ice-like crust, hummed and screamed and sometimes, when they struck the face, they brought blood.

Even as the storm seemed to have reached its height it redoubled its efforts. In its most terrific blasts it would have been impossible to make headway against it. But far greater than its physical force was the mental effect. The mind could comprehend the real scope of the storm, could visualize the unbroken white plain extending for hundreds and hundreds of miles, could grasp the vastness of the boreal kingdom, the free sweep of the glacial wind and the abject helplessness of a mere human caught in the grip of it.

It was with this numbing thought that Theo struggled as they plodded on to the river, as they erected the tent in the shelter of the bank, as they gathered a few willow twigs and built a fire in the little stove.

While a black shroud displaced the gray curtain, while the night wore on torturously and endlessly, while another day came and still the storm screamed and roared across the barrens, she lay huddled in her sleeping bag, wide-eyed and hopeless. She had only a picture of Homer Bishop blinded, buffeted and wandering helplessly, fighting desperately and at last crushed by the terrible forces he opposed.

"Wayne," she whispered, "he never can come back now, can he?"

Ballard knew she had lost hope, that she was seeking only a shred of assurance, and his jealous rage made it impossible for him to tell what he knew she wanted most to hear.

"I don't see how he can," he answered. "He must have missed us in the storm."

Even though he realized the full import of the situation and understood how thoroughly their chance to live depended upon Homer and his rifle, there was a gloating note in his voice. The dominant male to whom Theo had turned in the crisis had failed her, had gone down before the north. She heard it and withdrew into her sleeping bag. Ballard watched her dully. There was nothing he could say. He believed she might be revived by a reassurance as to her own safety; but even had he been able to give it he was powerless to back it up. With what food they had they might struggle on, but when it was gone there was no hope for more.

THE short day passed and the black curtain again replaced the gray. The intensity of the storm had never become less. All the forces of the north were concentrated upon that little tent, the sole habitation of white people in one huge corner of the continent. The wind, the cold, the blinding snow, the knowledge of vast, empty spaces, the memory of the toil and privations of the last two months, the certainty of death in the end, all combined to bear down upon it, crushing and numbing these two who huddled so helplessly within.

Theo, worn out by her previous night of wakefulness, slept fitfully. Ballard lay staring at the darkness, visualizing the three hundred miles that lay between them and Fort Churchill, weighing against it the hundred pounds of meat on the sled, searching, scheming, devising, realizing in impotent fury that if he could only conquer food he could win love and life itself.

He did not know he slept until he wakened to find that dawn had come and the storm had blown itself out. The cold was intense as it always is when the sky has been swept clean and the wind has died away. He leaped up instantly.

"What shall we do?" Theo asked.

It was the first time since he had told the truth about the cache that she had turned to him. Yet even as he knew what the elimination of one male had done to her and as he scorned her for it he desired her. Hope flared again. Once before he had gone out despairing yet determined and he had come back a conqueror and had been received as one.

"Would you go on with me?" he asked eagerly.

"But we can't! We have so little. And without a rifle!"

She broke off, appalled by the thought.

"But if I should make a way?" he persisted. "I might find the rifle, even if he is dead, or a caribou that he killed before the storm caught him."

It was the first hope he had held out to her and her eyes lighted. When he saw them his heart leaped. He knew the struggle he must make, but he had glimpsed the reward. The apathy in which he had plodded along behind Homer and Theo suddenly vanished. When he faced the woman he was already the dominant male he would become for her, was even, in imagination, bringing her the gifts her love of life demanded.

"Come on!" he cried exultantly. "We'll search for it! Somehow, somewhere, I'll find the way out for both of us."

In a frenzy of impatience he began to pack. Theo went outside to wait for him and she alone heard the hail from the top of the bank. For a moment she stared incredulously and then rushed forward.

"Homer!" she cried. "Homer!"

He stood grinning down upon her, one hand holding the rifle, the other supporting a deer swung across his shoulders. He turned slightly and tossed the deer to one side so that it slid down beside the tent. Then, running a little way to a place where the bank was lower, he leaped to the river-bed.

Theo rushed to meet him. Ballard, who had just been lifted from despair to dizzy heights and had been fired with the new hope of winning life and the woman, came out of the tent. He saw Homer stop, saw Theo fling herself upon him, her arms about his neck, saw Homer's free arm swing around her.

Once he had accepted the loss of Theo and the ultimate settlement Homer would demand, but on the verge of a new triumph his spirit had been revivified. It flared now in what we term jealousy, but the wells of human emotion are deep. First of all, life demands life. Then it seeks perpetuation as instinctively and as blindly as a plant seeks the sun.

A PASSION of revolt swept over him and started him forward. Grasping Theo by one shoulder, he hurled her across the snow. With the return swing of his body he struck Homer in the face with his mittened fist.

As the sight of Theo in the other man's arms had stripped Ballard of all restraint, so the attack denuded Homer of all the acquired characteristics of his race. Neither man became as the Indians who had once roamed the barren grounds. Centuries of effort to survive had taught them to buy or steal their women and to save their energies for the chase. These two men with white skins reverted completely, leaped across the barbaric and savage ages and became again of the caverns.

Because his instinct was to strike and rend and claw, Homer dropped his rifle the moment he was struck. He reeled backward slightly stunned, his feet slipped and he went down. Ballard dropped upon him, flailing heedlessly with both fists.

Brute strength and the desire to slay were the sole elements of the battle that ensued. There was no skill or conscious effort to exercise skill. There was no generalship, no plan of attack, no defense.

Neither was there retreat or attempt to evade punishment. The two were mad with the lust to kill, crazed by the desire to win the ascendency, and they struck, gouged, clawed, kicked, and always bounded back to the attack when the force of the struggle threw them apart.

As the fight was primitive, so were the emotions of Theo Spencer as she watched it. She sat huddled on the snow where Ballard had flung her. Though a product of the highest civilization, though trained to think, though accustomed through life to ease and easy acquisition, to unthwarted whim and undisputed option, she now waited dully for the decision.

Cold, toil, danger, distance and desolation had restricted these three to a diminutive world and bare existence, and the huge obstacles gave to that world the semblance of permanency. As it seemed to Homer and Ballard that everything depended upon victory, so it seemed to Theo that the conflict would decide for all time. If she had a preference she did not express it. If she desired one or the other to win she did not go to his assistance. She only knew that the one who came to her at the end would be the stronger.

The stronger won. Homer Bishop had been within a mile of the tent through the two days and nights of the storm, snugly covered by his sleeping-bag and drifting snow and with the deer to feed upon. He had come back at the first opportunity, rested, hardened and fit, flushed by the highest achievement of his world, success in the chase, and by the tribute of the softer dependent.

The very fury of the battle between the two exhausted them, and because Homer had led the harder life and had the harder body he triumphed.

The end came quickly. Ballard fought desperately to the last moment. Then fury and hatred could not drive spent muscles farther. In one last effort he flung Homer from him, only to have his opponent bound back. They met chest to chest and Ballard went down, Homer on top of him, hands at his throat.

In a victorious frenzy the conqueror battered his victim's head against the hard snow. He had proved his mastery and was intent only upon making his ascendency secure by killing Ballard. Then Theo screamed.

It was not a cry of protest or of horror or even of exultation. For her the mastery had been decided, the fight ended. The scream had been the natural expression of her relief.

But it was enough to bring Homer back to a semblance of normality. He looked up at the woman, she extended a hand in an unconscious gesture, and he leaped to his feet.

"Get up, Ballard!" he cried exultantly. "I won't kill you. I can't spare a dog from the traces."

HOMER'S victory over Ballard brought out with startling distinctness what had formerly been a faint line of demarcation in that little desolation-bound universe. As every world must have its leaders and its followers, its kings and its slaves, theirs assumed definite social strata.

Uppermost was Homer Bishop, stronger and more confident than ever, no longer fearing the north or what it might do. Physical force had won him his position and because his was a world of flesh and blood it was not for him "the frozen echo of the silent voice of God." When a man conquers everything in sight he has no need of a deity.

Clinging to him, rising with him in his success, gladly submissive, was Theo Spencer. She desired only matehood with this man whose power had been proven and she was content to be in his reflected glory.

To Ballard was left the lowest stratum. He became a serf to valor, a vassal of might, a bond slave of brute force and circumstance. Sullen and silent, he could only pull at the traces through the long day and crawl, unnoticed, into his sleeping bag at night.

They went on, day after day. Ahead strode Homer and Theo, their shoulders touching, the traces drawing them together. Homer spoke triumphantly of distance gained, of the game awaiting them in the timber, of the certainty of ultimate success. Theo, subtly and intuitively, answered with quick glances of admiration and happy smiles of contentment. Behind them, watching them, helpless and embittered, plodded Ballard. He saw and he understood, but he was cowed by his very impotence.

Because of his position next to the sled much of the work of guiding and steering fell to him. The sled alone was lower and upon it only could he give vent to his rare flashes of virulence. If it caught on a rock in a wind-swept spot, if it started to slide sideways on the slope of a low ridge, he flung himself upon it in sudden fury, jerked it free and then leaped back against his shoulder-strap. In that dreary, desolate world of drudgery the sled offered him his one moment of escape from a purely physical existence.

At the close of the third day after the fight between Homer and Ballard the three were struggling on through the long twilight. They had left the rolling plains and had entered rougher country. The low ridges had steeper sides and were studded with outcroppings of rock and huge boulders.

In the half-darkness they started down a hillside. The sled slued and crashed against a half-hidden boulder. Ballard jerked it free with a muttered curse, but the sled skidded on, straight toward the edge of a steep bank.

In a sudden access of anger Ballard hurled himself upon it. The heavy load gathered momentum and he was thrown from his feet and hurled down hill against a boulder. The sled followed and crushed his leg against the rock. Ballard rolled over with a cry of pain.

"What's the matter?" Homer asked as he ran up.

"My leg," Ballard answered between clenched teeth. "It's smashed."

Homer bent quickly, jerked off a mitten and felt of the injured man's forehead. It was wet with perspiration.

"We'll make camp right now," he said. "Have to get off this slope first. Can you walk?"

"I don't think so, without help."

"Can't walk!" Theo cried in consternation.

"We can haul him," Homer answered curtly. "We'll have to. What we need now is the tent, a fire and a look at that leg."

He helped Ballard on to the sled and then guided it down the slope to the bottom.

"Start to put up the tent," he commanded as Theo stood looking at him. "I'm going to try for some willows along this creek bed."

An hour later when the tent was up, a fire built and it was warm enough within the little shelter to uncover Ballard's leg they found it discolored and swollen.

"You're lucky it's only a bad bruise and not a break," Homer said after an examination. "As it is, you won't walk for a week at the earliest, and it'll be twice as long before you can pull."

As he spoke Theo glanced at the meat supply. They had finished the last of the small caribou Homer had shot and less than a hundred pounds of meat and fat brought from the Eskimo camp remained. In a week it would be gone, the week during which Ballard could not walk.

Once Theo would not have seen the results so clearly, but she had learned the inexorable terms of the barren ground equation. Life depended upon progress and progress was determined by food. Struggle as they might, the great god of the north held them in his power.

Homer was wrapping the injured leg in a bandage torn from an old undershirt. His face was lighted by the red glare from the open draft of the stove. Crouching in a dark corner, Theo studied it, trying to grasp the reasons back of his apparent acceptance of his added burden. But she found only concentration upon the task at hand.

Later he left the tent to search for more fuel and she followed.

"How can we do it?" she burst forth. "There's only enough meat for a week as it is. We've got to make each day count if we get to timber."

"It will make it harder," Homer agreed absently, and then he added: "But that's the way with the north. She always hits you when you're winning."

In his tone was a suggestion of unconscious confidence and of buoyancy of spirit which silenced Theo. She sensed that nothing she might say could touch him, and she was right. He saw the situation concretely. To him Ballard was only an injured man who must be carried on, whose chances must be theirs. The fact that he had threatened to kill the other when they had attained safety, that Ballard was no longer of assistance, could not influence him. There was nothing in his creed which would permit him to exact vengeance now.

The next day they started on, Ballard, in his sleeping-bag, lashed to the sled, Homer and Theo, shoulder to shoulder, straining at the traces. They made fair progress until noon. Then the country became still rougher. Higher hills forced detours instead of the nearly straight line they had been following. The smooth surface of the crust was broken by wind-carved ridges. They encountered areas of level land made impassable by thickly strewn boulders.

Homer toiled the harder, lifting the sled over snow hummocks, easing it down slopes, searching constantly for the best route. But when night came they were only two miles from the spot where they had stopped at noon.

He was up early the next morning but an hour after starting they were in a country of steep hillsides, deep gullies and rock outcroppings which made it impossible for them to drag the double load.

"It means two trips," Homer announced as he stopped to rest. "We'll have to haul Ballard on, drop him and then come back for the grub and outfit. But this sort of going can't last long."

BUT it did last. It even increased in difficulty until Ballard alone made a heavy load. Hour after hour they toiled on. At the end of each mile Homer unloaded the injured man and went back alone for the tent, stove, sleeping robes and food.

The country became still rougher and the progress slower. The second day a strong wind swept the barren grounds, scorching their faces and filling the air with fine, grating crystals. The third day fresh snow mingled with that torn by the wind from the hard crust and in the gray smother Homer did not dare leave Ballard and Theo more than half a mile in advance.

In preparation for the lean days to come they had already cut down on their rations. The lack of food and the excessive exertion began to claim their toll. Homer's exuberance faded and in its place was a stubborn resolution. Steadily, doggedly and unsparingly he threw himself against the traces and he did not call a halt at night until he was nearly spent.

Theo did not protest after her first outburst. Even before she had recognized his unalterable determination she had been afraid to put her thoughts into words or to make her meaning perfectly clear. Then, as excessive exertion threw Homer into an exalted mood of service, she dared not risk opposing the spiritual force which possessed him. But because she knew reaction must come she never abandoned her purpose. Day after day she waited. She saw Homer traveling three miles to gain one. She watched the food disappearing in terrifying contrast to the distance gained. And not once in all that time did their constant search of the horizon reveal anything except a complete emptiness of life.

She knew each hour hastened the time when will power could no longer force a weary body, when recoil would deliver him a helpless victim to her suggestion.

At noon of the fourth day they reached a large river flowing straight east. It offered easy going and swift progress, for on its level surface they could trot steadily with the combined load. Theo turned to Homer in quick elation.

"A smooth trail!" she cried.

"Only we can't go that way."

"But why?"

"Because it would take us farther and farther from timber."

He paused a moment and then an exultance he had tried to conceal forced expression.

"I wasn't going to say anything until I was sure," he continued. "It was still storming off to the south, but I thought I caught a glimpse of timber from that last ridge."

"Timber!" Theo cried. "Timber and game!"

"Timber and a chance of game," he corrected grimly.

They had been standing beside the sled and Homer lifted Ballard off and turned it around. He worked quickly, galvanized by his desire to confirm his hope.

"The storm is clearing," he said to Theo. "I can make sure when I come back with the second load."

He started off on a run with the empty sled. Theo, watching him as he reached the crest of the ridge, saw by his brief search that the horizon had not cleared. She waited until he had disappeared over the crest and then started after him. She was waiting at the top when he came toiling back up the steep and rocky hillside.

"Can you see timber?" he asked eagerly.

She turned without replying and stared toward the south. He stopped beside her and looked. The north wind had crowded the clouds beyond the horizon and that horizon lay before him, an arc of unbroken white.

"I made a mistake."

The flatness of his tone more than his words showed how completely he had succumbed to the disappointment.

"There's not a sign of timber, not a sign."

It was the first time Theo had heard that note in Homer's voice. She had been waiting for it, had keyed herself to be sensitive to the slightest sign of it, and now she was instantly alert. She whirled to face him.

"Then—then, Homer! It is the end?"

With his eyes on the white plain before him he slowly nodded his head.

"Homer! Homer!" she cried as she flung herself upon him. "It can't be! We must not have it so! Not now, when life is just beginning."

EXCEPT for that brief instant when she had rushed to him after he had returned, as she believed, from the dead, and before Ballard had hurled her away, there had been no open declaration between these two. Theo's subtle advances and Homer's unconscious acceptance of the situation were the sole expressions of the relations that had been developed so inevitably in their little universe.

Now, for the first time, she was unrestrained and unashamed. The master of her world and of her destiny admitted the end, and in an agony of protest, in an instinctive desire for life, in a fierce determination to have those things which life demands, she fought with all the weapons of her sex.

"We can't die now, dearest!" she cried, and in her voice there was the ferocity of tigress love. "We can't! We've fought too hard and endured too much. We've won the right to live. We must have it."

She was clinging to him with fierce tenderness. Her upturned face was close to his. Tears were in her eyes, but they only deepened the passion of her glance.

More awed than dazzled, Homer looked down upon her. He felt her arms about his neck, her soft body so close to his. Her warm breath touched his frost-bitten cheeks and then unconsciously his glance went past her to Ballard as he lay on the ice of the river beneath, helpless, dependent, a victim of the north.

Theo, watchful, hungry for a softening glance, read his thought.

"No! No!" she cried. "It is of me, of you and me together, not of him, that we must think. He has forfeited his life. You've said it, said it to him. You let him live only to help me. Now why should both of us die because he must? Unburdened we could go on.

"And I love you, Homer. Do you know what that could mean, what I could do for you? We must go on so that you can know it, can see what I want to be. We will put this country behind us, this country with its crushing desolation and its cold that blights and blackens everything of beauty. We will go together to other lands, warm, sunny lands, lands made for loving.

"We will sit on the sand and look at the warm, blue sea. At night we'll walk in gardens, moon-lit gardens. And there I can be beautiful for you, Homer, only for you. Always we will be there together, always together."

Her eyes held his now, unwaveringly and completely. She clung closer, tightened her arms about his neck and drew herself up until her lips touched his.

It was the match to the powder train. He crushed her to him, covered her face with kisses, and all the time he babbled incoherently, joyously, madly.

That first burst of passion spent, he suddenly released her and stooped to pick up the traces.

"Come on!" he whispered. "Now!"

But he turned suddenly and again picked her up in his arms.

"My woman! Mine!" he cried exultantly. "You are mine! I won you! I earned you! I'm going to have you!"

He carried her to the sled and set her upon it.

"Ride!" he shouted boyishly. "I can pull you all the way to Churchill."

He leaped against the traces and started down the long slope to the river.

Weariness, cold and hunger, all the sodden dreariness and blinding despair of the past, were forgotten in the rapture of the moment. He sped on, not toward Ballard, but toward the southland Theo had pictured for him. He saw the two of them together there, safe, warm, blissful.

For years he had been fighting the north, striving, enduring, making a comrade of danger and a playfellow of death. He had never had the softer things and the easier things. Now they were in his grasp and with the memory of her kisses, of her clinging arms and soft body, his drunken, reeling mind was revolted by the life and the land he believed he had loved.

They were almost at the river bank. Ballard was waiting only a hundred yards away. Homer stopped and looked at Theo, drinking thirstily the fierce, passionate appeal of her.

"Wait here," he said, and he went on alone to the man who lay on the ice.

Ballard was facing him. The flap of his sleeping bag was open and as Homer approached he lifted himself on one elbow. His eyes did not waver. For days he had seen the thought forming in Theo's mind, had seen her sit like a waiting, brooding shadow of evil. And once he himself had been engulfed as he knew the other now was engulfed.

He gave no intention of asking for quarter. Already he had accepted the situation. But before they left him he desired only to divest this man of his false trappings of impersonal justice.

"So she kissed you, too," he said.

BALLARD pulled the flap of his sleeping-bag over his head. He did it exactly as though he were closing a door in the other's face and Homer was left staring at the enshrouded figure.

He stared only a moment and then wheeled toward Theo. She was where he had left her, sitting on the sled. Even at that distance, and despite the clumsy hood of her parka, he could distinguish her confident poise as she sat facing the south, facing timber and food and the way out, the warm, sunny lands made for loving.

"So she kissed you, too."

Ballard's words seemed to be repeated by the Homer of old to the Homer he had become and the frost-seared skin of his face was scorched by the blast of his own contempt.

She had kissed Ballard, and Ballard had stolen Kenneth Poole's food and had murdered Kenneth Poole because of that kiss. She had kissed for food, had kissed a man's life away, and now she had kissed him, and had dangled a million kisses before his eyes, and she had done it for more food, had done it though she knew a murder must be committed.

Then she had not known about Kenneth. Now she demanded Ballard's food and Ballard's life, and she did it shamelessly and remorselessly.

Ballard had fallen victim to those kisses; but he had killed in the dark. He had been starving and he had found food and had taken it and he might never have known that his act had been both theft and murder.

But he, Homer Bishop, had walked into the snare with open eyes, with a full consciousness of what he was doing. From the top of that low ridge he had been shown the world and had been promised the world, and though the helpless man lay on the ice before him he had looked beyond, a willing victim of the spell of this living Fata Morgana.

Once he had believed himself a god, impersonal, inexorable and just. He had claimed godship and the right to vengeance. Now he had become this craven thing hiding behind a false pretense of enforcing the laws of the north, selling for a woman's kisses the birthright earned by toil and courage.

Once he had possessed the right to exact vengeance, the vengeance to which the north and the spirit of Kenneth Poole were entitled. Now he had robbed himself of that right and had lost to them their just retribution.

Such were the thoughts that swept through his mind as he looked at the woman on the sled. So overwhelmed was he by loathing and contempt for himself that he had none for her. From that moment she ceased to exist for him. He wheeled back to the injured man at his feet.

"Ballard," he said huskily, "I beg your pardon—for a good many things. And I'm going to get you out."

It was not a promise to the other so much as a pledge of decency for himself. It rang clearly and distinctly, carrying with it some of his old spirit of battle, comforting him with the terrific nature of the task it imposed. It ended, too, his introspection, changed him from a bewildered, groping, self-condemning individual to a man of action and determination.

As he ran toward the sled Theo arose, picked up her trace and stood waiting in confidence and triumph, her eyes alight. But her assurance did not even taunt him. She was like some sinister phantom of an illness which returning health had thrust into the shadow world. He looked past her to the sled and the little bag of meat, planning and summoning his last strength.

Then he suddenly swung the sled toward Ballard and started back on the run. Theo followed, but before she had caught up with him he had placed the injured man upon it and had turned upstream, toward the west, away from Fort Churchill. He pulled alone, his face set in grim, hard lines, his eyes forbidding. Theo, after one glance at him, took up her old place at the rear.

Half an hour later he stopped at the mouth of a small tributary lined with willows. There he erected the tent, helped Ballard inside, set up the stove and kindled a fire. He placed a kettle of meat over the blaze, but he did not wait until it was done. Instead, he threw a chunk of frozen meat into his sleeping-bag, slung it over his shoulder, picked up his rifle and went outside. Theo followed. "What——?"

She had gathered her forces for a final attack, but she never went beyond the first word. If he had blazed out at her she might have been able to go on, might have matched his scorn with her own, might have retained self-respect in the thought that she dared where he did not, might still have clutched her precious faith that sex ruled the world. But he only looked down at her as one looks down from a great height.

"Wait here," he said. "I will be back."

HE STARTED toward the south bank of the river in that long, easy, liquid trot of the north.

He did not return that night or the next day. Theo gathered twigs, cooked the slender meals and sat huddled beside the little stove. Ballard lay in his sleeping-bag, wide-eyed, staring at the ridge-pole, apparently unconscious of her presence.

In the middle of the second night Homer entered with a wolf upon his shoulders. He dropped it beside the stove, took a piece of frozen meat, crawled into his bag and went to sleep before he had gnawed half his supper. When the others wakened in the morning he was gone.

Three days and two nights went by before they saw him again. The red glare from the stove draft showed a worn, drawn face and eyes that smoldered fiercely far back in deep sockets. He did not speak. He did not seem to know they were there. He roasted some of the wolf, gulped it much as the wolf itself must have eaten, crawled into his bag and went to sleep.

It was still dark when he aroused them in the morning. The meat and fat were all gone. Nothing was left of the wolf. Breakfastless, silent, Ballard lashed to the sled, Theo in the traces beside Homer, they started, and again their route was toward the west, away from Fort Churchill.

Before daylight they came to a large lake. They followed the south shore for a few miles and then turned inland, up the slope of a ridge. Through the short day they toiled ceaselessly. Sometimes they stopped panting and exhausted, and threw themselves upon the snow. But after a moment Homer was up again, plunging against the traces.

Weak with hunger, but crushed as much by the spiritual forces which had overwhelmed her as by the physical hardships she endured, Theo succumbed at last. She staggered out of the path of the sled and dropped to the snow. Homer looked at her a moment and then released the strap from her shoulders.

"Wait here," he said. "I'll be back for you."

He went on alone with Ballard for another mile, when he came to a stream. In the gathering darkness he peered about for a moment, satisfied himself that he had reached the right spot, deposited his load upon the ice and returned.

Theo was where he had left her, moaning from cold and weakness and terror. He placed her on the sled and started back, rushing down the slopes, toiling fiercely up the ridges, panting, fighting, driving himself mercilessly. When he reached Ballard he did not stop to rest, but loaded the sled with its double burden of human freight and started down the little river.

The going was smooth, but the sled was heavy and for twelve hours Homer had been spending energy with fierce recklessness. Yet he seemed to tap some hidden source of power. His pace did not become slower nor did the traces ever slacken.

Mile after mile he struggled on. The stream widened. Small bushes appeared on the banks. Then single dwarfed spruces showed black against the white ridges. These gave way to larger growth, in groups, until at last, in the intense cold, beneath the bright arctic stars, he was traveling between solid ranks of trees.

The river swung around in a sharp horseshoe bend. Homer turned to shore and stopped. In the snow, scattered over a large, blood-stained spot, were the bones of a caribou. They had been stripped clean of meat. Even the thigh bones had been cracked for the marrow. A mouse could not have gnawed a meal from the remains.

Homer stared. The courage had gone out of him as gas leaves a bursting balloon. But it swept back again, fierce, resistless and unconquerable.

"We'll have to make a hungry camp," he said as he turned to the sled. "I killed a caribou, but the wolves got here first."

He helped Theo and Ballard into their sleeping bags, and crawled into his own.

THAT was only the first of many similar days. Where men of the north consider three large snowshoe rabbits a meal, they sometimes subsisted an entire day on one. Some days, as that first, they went without a mouthful, but there were red-letter days when they built a huge fire and gorged on caribou. But always despair and hunger dogged them. Ballard, because Homer insisted, remained on the sled until there was no danger of further injury to his leg. When at last he took his place on the trail, hobbling at the rear, Theo succumbed to the crushing, numbing forces of the north. Moaning, prostrated as much by despair as by physical weakness, she collapsed and Homer placed her on the sled and dragged her on.

Homer alone seemed indomitable. Ballard fought bravely enough for a time, but pain sapped his energy as much as exertion and sometimes he tottered into camp after the others were asleep. Theo never revived. She remained a shivering, pitiful shadow of herself.

And yet Homer fought on, apparently without diminution of vigor. He seemed to toil as hard with an empty stomach as with a full one, to fight as fiercely when starvation gripped them as when a caribou had brought temporary relief. To Ballard, hobbling at the rear of the sled, and to Theo, shivering upon it, he seemed a veritable dynamo, recharging energy as fast as he expended it.

Beyond that they did not go, nor could they. Their misery was too great to permit them to understand the bitterness and contempt he had for himself, for the man he might have become, for the thing he had almost let Theo make of him.

It was the vehemence of this abhorrence, the fierceness of his desire for immolation, that furnished the indomitable driving force. An hour after Theo had induced him to leave Ballard to die he had fought the matter out. He had seen food and sex disputing for the mastery, he had seen the primitive passions they had aroused tainting the pure air of his beloved north, and he had seen himself the willing victim and plaything of both.

From the entire situation he had found only one means of escape. He had sinned, not before God or man, but before himself. Upon the altar of his own soul he must lay his atonement. His spirit demanded the austere penance of the ascetic, and no priest of India ever derived greater rapture from unsparing self-torture.

When his body writhed with pain and weakness he drove it faster. When another step seemed impossible he took a thousand. When despair blackened everything about him he fought with that fierce spirit of a man who battles for something more in life than the living.

And yet, savage and unsparing as he was with himself, he displayed only tenderness toward the others. As individuals they had ceased to exist for him. They were only pawns in his game, puppets in his life drama. He looked upon them as bits of precious freight that somehow, in spite of any obstacles, he must deliver at Fort Churchill.

But because they must be delivered safely he guarded them, nursed them, robbed himself of food and sleep for them, fought always to keep the spark of life from flickering. Though their souls might be blackened and twisted and scarred, though they would forever bear the terrible impress of the north, their lives must be saved if his own soul were to live, if the god in him were to conquer.

Two months after they had left the Eskimo camp on the Kazan River he succeeded. All day the unappeasable north flung itself upon them. Like two skeletons, their skin clothing flapping about them, Homer and Ballard toiled at the traces. Their faces were blackened by soot and frost. Their brains reeled from delirium and the buffeting of the storm. Their feet swung forward slowly and painfully.

Theo lay on the sled as if dead. Every few yards Ballard gave up and tumbled to the snow. Each time Homer would lift him to his feet and start him on. In those three miles, which dragged through ten hours of blinding, swirling, enveloping storm, he fought more valiantly than at any time in the seven hundred terrible miles behind them.

For, blackened and emaciated specter that he was, he lived in a beautiful ecstasy of spirit. All the essential experiences of a lifetime had been crowded into four months. All the basic emotions under which the souls of men have buckled had engulfed him. Yet he had emerged victorious, and because he had won back the joyous courage of youth he walked on unconquered, brave in the knowledge that life lay ahead of him and that he had learned to grasp it cleanly.

At last, in the darkness, he stopped before the trade shop of the Hudson's Bay Company. He dragged the sled close, lifted the latch, pushed Ballard through the door and then turned and was lost in the storm.

Ten minutes later he staggered into the warm living-room of a mission. The man who had come into the wilderness to harvest souls, but who had remained to reap the friendship of the sons of the north, looked up. He had seen many men come out of the barren grounds in many ways and now he raised his hand in an unconscious gesture of salute.

A Great Comedian Makes Fun of Himself

"Double or Quits" By George Robey

Mr. Robey, who is the best beloved of all English funny men,
has written a fiction story about himself and it will appear in

September EVERYBODY'S *Out August 15*

In Hell-hole Swamp

The Author of "Brooders" Weaves a Story About a People Who Live Almost Unknown on Our Front Door-step

By Walter De Leon

Illustration by Robert A. Graef

THIS is the story told me a few nights ago by my brother. Paul is several sorts of an engineer: construction, erection, refrigeration, ventilation, in fact almost every kind except a stationary engineer. Though not yet thirty-five, he has traveled in more queer territories and has seen more queer people than the ordinary man encounters in a lifetime.

I had been telling my brother about a friend of mine who had unostentatiously sailed for parts unknown after inveigling me into indorsing several of his notes. Paul grinned sympathetically.

"Yes, sir," he agreed, "there are two kinds of friends; the friends we make, and the friends who make us. But I once had a friend——" Paul puffed his cigar and settled his feet comfortably atop my desk.

EVER hear of Hell-hole Swamp, down in South Carolina? Any revenue officer can tell you the way to get into it. Take a train at Charleston and ride twenty-four miles to Monk's Corners which is right at the edge of the Swamp. But you can't find any revenue officer who can tell you how to get out of Hell-hole. Up to date not one of them has ever done it.

Draining into the Santee, the Swamp is about twenty-five miles wide and forty miles long, its muddy surface broken by heavily wooded knolls anywhere from half an acre to twenty in size.

Because of their antipathy to outsiders generally and government officers particularly, nobody knows how many Hell-holians there are in the Swamp, logging, running their portable sawmills, farming—principally corn—and raising the finest razor-back hogs ever put on the market. Abe Isaacs, the Charleston banker who has a branch at Monk's Corners—open Wednesdays and Fridays only—knows more about the inhabitants than most any man in the South. He's done all their business for them for years. He doesn't go after their business, understand. He stays in Monk's Corners, Wednesday and Friday, where there are a couple of stores and revenue officers and a railroad to ride away on, and lets Hell-hole come to him. Anyway, Isaacs estimates there are about two thousand men, women and children in the Swamp.

"Listen, Paul," he told me as we stepped off the train at the Corners. "Before you go in to set up the engine Dick Thornton has somehow dragged the eighteen miles out to the sawmill on his knoll, I want to warn you about a couple of things. These Hell-holians are a mixture of old Indian and poor white-trash blood. They're exclusive and sensitive. Paul, you got no idea how sensitive they are. They don't like to be asked questions. Get me? But when they begin asking you your business, tell 'em fully, frankly and freely. Tell 'em your name, and your brother's name and the name of your brother's little baby. Tell 'em you're an engineer out of luck on account of having to install seventy tons of machinery in Hell-hole Swamp in August. Prove it to 'em. Don't show 'em no letters of credit or your army discharge or your specifications because not one of 'em can either read or write. And they're sensitive. Talk to 'em and use plain, homelike words while talking. Even the triggers of their sawed-off shotguns are sensitive.

"They've got their own laws and no schools. Either they're Jacobites or Davidites, and they're so fervent in their religious beliefs that every now and then of a Sunday morning after a rousing revival at the meeting-house, the Jacobites rush over in holy zeal to the opposition church and shoot the living daylight out of the worshiping Davidites.

"Listen, Paul, I ain't telling you this to scare you or nothing. But so many guys have gone into the Swamp that never—You see, Paul, they're so ignorant and so sensitive!"

A few minutes later, Dick Thornton, the richest man in the Swamp, worth about two hundred thousand dollars, drove his buckboard up to the bank. Thornton was a big man, fat and greasy, with the dark copper-colored skin and straight, thick, black hair that always makes you think of gipsies when you look at a Hell-holian. Isaacs introduced us.

" 'Morning, stranger," Thornton grunted.

"Good morning, Mr. Thornton." I shook hands with him.

"Before you go, will you sign this paper?" Isaacs asked the big man. "It's that last lumber contract."

The banker, at the bottom of the contract, wrote "Dick Thornton," and gave the pen to Thornton. He slowly and painstakingly made his mark between the two names of the signature.

"Ready, stranger?" he asked.

"Let's go," I said.

Thornton took a rusty, sawed-off shotgun from the seat of the buckboard and stood it between his knees as he picked up the reins.

It was slow traveling. Sometimes, dipping back into the ooze after leaving the road across a knoll, we'd drive a quarter of a mile, our feet up on the dashboard, the water slapping against the horse's belly, before we'd strike the path or trail across the next knoll. A couple of times we passed an ox team, with a kid standing on the rump of the nigh wheel-ox, dragging logs through the water on a kind of skid. Thornton let me enjoy the scenic beauties undisturbed. He was as full of conversation as an oil-gage.

It was about noon when we reached Thornton's Knoll and pulled up in front of his house. Fourteen kids ran out to meet their daddy. All the neighbors and mill employees gathered round to study the sweltering stranger from the outside world.

We went into the kitchen to eat. Outside it was only one hundred and two degrees hot. But that was outside. They placed me with my back to the busy stove and put in front of me a steaming plate of rice and fried salt pork, swimming in hog grease. And I want to go on record as declaring that, remembering how sensitive they were, I ate it all.

"Stranger," Thornton asked, passing his plate for a second helping, "what church do you-all go to. We-uns is Jacobites."

I saw one of his boys bringing in the old man's shotgun.

"So am I," I told him.

MY CHIEF helper at the plant was Thornton's oldest son, Skip. He was a rather good-looking chap, tall, well set up, broad-shouldered, dark coppery of course, and strong as seven mules. But when it came to conserving words, he made the average mule sound like a chattering magpie.

Right from the start I saw there was something wrong between Skip and his Dad. Thornton was continually "riding" the boy. I couldn't tell what it was, for Skip never talked back much when his father began cussing him. But it was easy to see that, far from being cowed or will-broken, the boy was holding himself in, biding his time.

The first Wednesday I was on the job Dick went into Monk's Corners right after breakfast. About ten o'clock Skip and I were making some boiler connections while carrying on an animated give-and-take conversation—me giving and Skip taking it all—when he unexpectedly said, "There ain't no reason you and me can't be friends, is there?"

"None at all," I assured him. "*I'm* friendly."

Skip dropped his tools. "I reckon it'll be 'bout three o'clock before I get back." With that he jumped on a peppery little horse he had and rode away.

I was still trying to figure what connection there was between friendship and his leaving me all his work to do when he returned that afternoon. I noticed he had a little white wild flower stuck in a buttonhole of his shirt. Picking up a Stillson wrench, he asked, "Dad been here?"

"No," I told him.

He looked at me steadily for a moment before saying quietly, "In Hell-hole, a man never does answer any questions asked 'bout his friends."

From which I somehow gathered that Skip was sensitive about having his Dad discover he'd been roaming the woods idly plucking wild flowers.

That was only the first time Skip wandred off the job after watching his father drive away on some all-day errand. He always returned before Dick reached home, always with a flower in his buttonhole and his horse's legs smeared with wet mud. The third time it happened, hoping to get a rise out of him, I started to sing, "Oh, Love Is a Wonderful Thing."

"Who said that?" Skip asked when I finished.

"Confucius or maybe Georgie Cohan," I said. "Anyway, he was an optimist."

"He was plumb crazy," Skip growled.

That night at the supper-table Thornton inquired, "Going to church to-morrow, stranger?"

Because of the informal Sunday receptions which Isaacs had told me one church often tendered another, I hadn't planned to attend any religious exercises while in Hell-hole. But before I could frame a polite refusal, Skip spoke up. "Yes. He's a-going with me."

Which I thought was real friendly of Skip. I had an idea he wanted to show me his girl.

We entered the meeting-house a few minutes before nine the next morning. There was neither altar, pulpit nor platform. Rows of chairs running across the room faced a narrow, bare floor-space in the center. There was no minister, presiding elder or choir visible. None of the congregation being able to read or write the place wasn't cluttered up with hymn or prayer-books. We sat down near the door.

A young chap with an accordeon pulled out a long chord and played a tune once through. Everybody—there were about sixty men and women in the room—stood up and sang four or five verses of something between a hymn and a chant. After a second of these hymns, four or five men, one after the other, rose and told the craziest, weirdest, most distorted versions of Bible stories imaginable, all dealing with a Deity of mighty wrath and fiery sword. As legend followed legend I could feel the growing tenseness of the assembled Jacobites. They commenced muttering, groaning, praying. Billy Sunday never worked the emotions of an audience into greater hysteria, or more quickly, than those ignorant, excited, fanatical speakers did.

Suddenly, a tall, gaunt man, a cheap, profusely illustrated Bible held aloft with his long arm, leaped to the center of the room. Opening to a page which pictured the devil holding a sinner extended on a long fork over the lurid red flames of Hades, he shrieked, "Brothers and sisters, look! This is what's a-going to happen to all Davidites, damn 'em!"

A woman screamed. Instantly, sixty people were on their feet, yelling and cursing. At the height of the confusion the accordeonist started a tune. An old man with a powerful voice joined him, singing. Over and over they repeated the hymn until one by one the rest of the congregation swung into the melody, stamping on the floor, shouting the words and swaying their bodies to the rhythm of the song. A religious ceremony? Then so is a college boys' serpentine after a football game.

There was a brief lull. A young man and woman walked to the clear space in the center of the room.

"We-uns is a-going to marry," the young man announced. "Who will witness for us?"

"I will, brother," the tall, gaunt man offered. Holding his Bible across his upraised palms he took his place in front of the couple. The groom raised the girl's left hand in his right. Their free hands they placed on the Bible.

In a loud voice, the groom cried, "Let all know this woman is now my wife."

"Let all know," the girl echoed clearly, "this man is now my husband."

"Let all know," shouted the tall man, "I have witnessed this marriage."

That was all there was to that. The bride and groom returned to their chairs. But the interruption had given a couple of men time to get up a full head of steam which they let loose, blistering the Davidites some

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more. Then the gentle, reverent Jacobites commenced drifting out of the church. Skip and I were the first to go.

Jogging homeward, side by side, I could see Skip was greatly troubled. His lips were mumbling, his squinted eyes were fixed unseeing on the road; there was a deep wrinkle between his black eyebrows. Pulling up short under the shade of a tree, he jerked his thumb in the direction of the church.

"You-all heard what they said back yonder?"

"Most of it," I answered.

"Now, friend, *you* tell me why all Davidites are a-going to hell!"

He was breathing laboredly, the faded wild flower in the buttonhole of his shirt—suddenly, looking at that wild flower, I saw the boy's trouble. His girl was a Davidite!

"Skip," I said, playing my hunch, "as one friend to another I don't believe they *are* all going there." Skip's eyes opened wide. "Outside of Hell-hole," I continued, "most folks believe that if a man runs straight and tries to do the square thing always, he stands a fair chance of dragging down a one-way ticket to heaven no matter *what* church his wife goes to."

"No matter *what* church?" I nodded. "How 'bout—women?" Then I knew I'd guessed right.

"Men or women, it doesn't make any difference. It's in the Bible," I added, taking a chance he wouldn't ask me to find the exact passage to read to him.

"The Bible!" Skip was quivering with surprise and eagerness. "Does it read that in the Bible Dad has home?"

"Yes. Remember the picture in it of those golden stairs leading up from the earth to that big, pink cloud fringed with angels and lyres? Well, there is no sign at the bottom of those stairs reading 'For Jacobites Only.' "

Skip looked at me searchingly. "You-all is telling me true, ain't you?"

"Yes. I'm your friend, ain't I?"

The tone of his voice was peculiar as he said, "You sure are."

I had a chance to prove it several mornings later. I was lining up my crank-shaft, bent over and industriously perspiring, when I heard a voice some little distance off. I didn't pay any attention to it on account of a goat that was trying to help me in Skip's absence and was beginning to take my rebuffs seriously. A minute afterward I saw the forefeet of a mule close to mine and felt his nuzzle on my back. I straightened up with a large monkey-wrench in my hand and a mouthful of uncouth words—and looked straight into the muzzle of a shotgun held across the knees of a dirty native astride the mule, a beady-eyed native hiding behind a lot of long, gray whiskers and a crop of heavy, matted hair which grew or hung down nearly to his bushy eyebrows.

"Stranger," he drawled, "in Hell-hole when a man says, ' 'Morning stranger,' you ought to say ' 'Morning' back to him."

I didn't waste any time apologizing or explaining. I " 'morning'd" him till the barrel of his gun shifted away from my belt-buckle.

"Where-at is Dick Thornton?"

"I'm not sure. I think he went to Monk's Corners to-day."

"Um-m. Well, stranger, when you-all see Dick, you-all tell him you been talking to Zeb Curran. Tell Dick if he don't keep his boy Skip away from my daughter, he ain't a-going to *have* no boy. 'Morning, stranger. Get on, mule."

When Skip returned, as an act of friendship, I told him of Zeb's neighborly visit.

"You ain't figuring on telling Dad, are you?" he asked.

"You *know* I'm not," I protested.

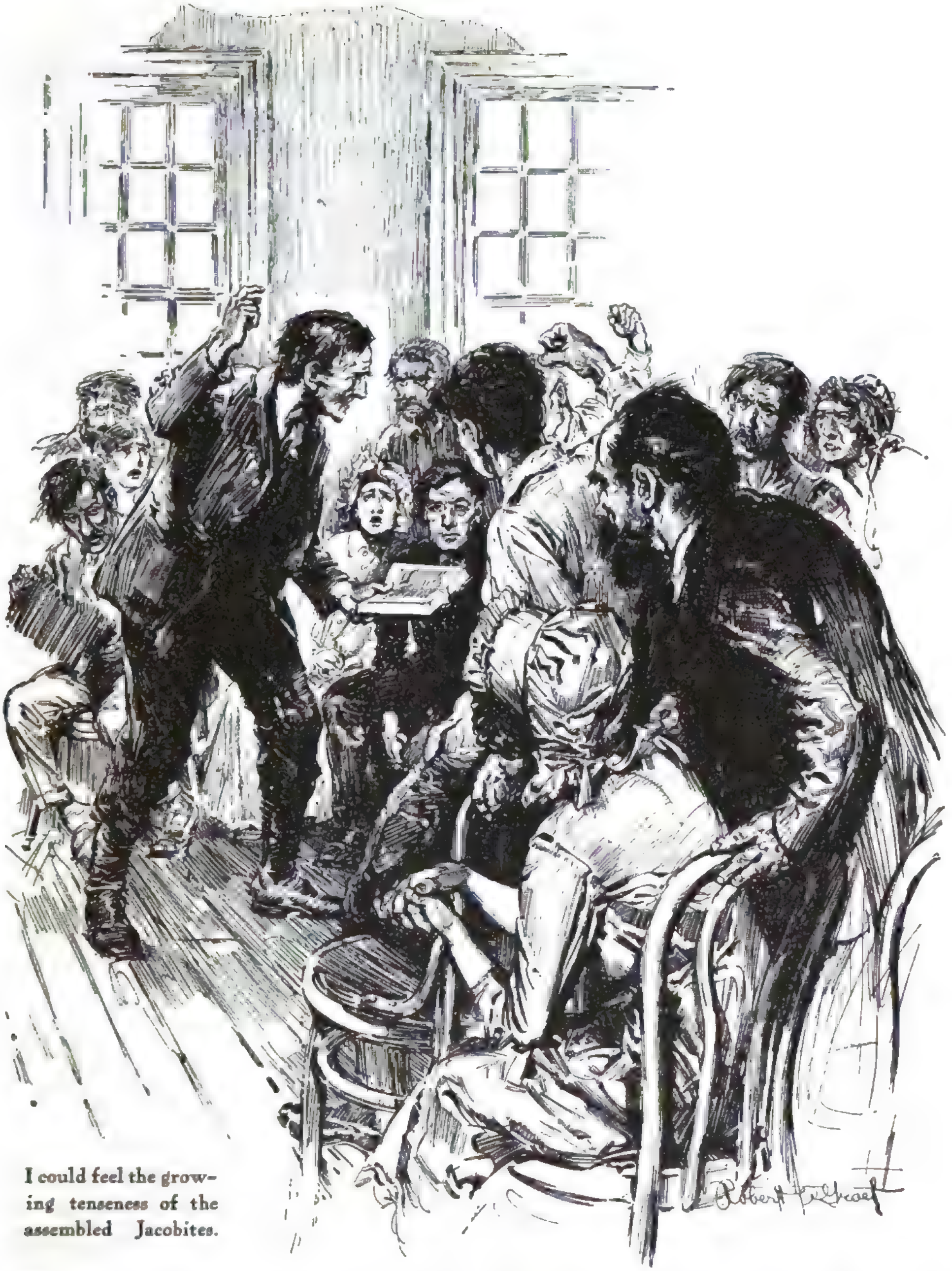
Skip regarded me in his large healthy manner. "When are you-all going to finish this here job?"

"As soon as possible. Looks like I'll be through next Saturday." I jacked up my courage. "What's her name, Skip?"

"Honey," replied the boy, fingering the wild flower in his shirt.

IT WAS Saturday when I turned over the fly-wheel to see if she'd hang together, packed my tools, washed up and began thinking pleasantly of Monk's Corners and points north. Dick Thornton called me into the kitchen and counted out three thousand dollars in small bills from a box he had under his arm.

"Final payment on my engine," he explained. I'll give you my horse and buckboard. You can leave 'em at the stable back of the boarding-house at the Corners. I'll get 'em when I go in Monday. I can't go to-day."



I could feel the growing tenseness of the assembled Jacobites.

"Why can't Skip drive me in," I suggested.

"Skip ain't going to leave this knoll for quite a spell," Dick replied. "You-all will have to take this money alone."

While Skip carefully explained the roads I was to follow, I wrapped up the money in a piece of paper and a prayer, and stuffed it in the inside pocket of my vest. Then I shook Skip's hand and waved the assembled kids and goats a fond, glad farewell.

In two hours I was lost. I was passing shacks and crossing knolls I knew I'd not seen on my way to Thornton's Knoll. But even so, I couldn't understand how I'd strayed off the right trail. Skip's directions had been so clear.

Black clouds began hurrying across the sky, bringing large quantities of rain to drop on Thornton's money and me. After an hour of it I decided to give my horse his head. That was the afternoon I learned horse-sense is just like human-sense. Great when you have it. My horse didn't.

It began to dawn on me that I was due to spend a wet night in Hell-hole unless succor should shortly arrive. I began hollering for help, trying to rouse some one who'd put me on the road to Monk's Corners. I knew they were strong, husky yells. I could hear them reechoing for seconds after I ran out of breath. But echoes were all I did hear.

For three weeks, before going to bed each night, I had oiled and polished a friendly .44 six-shooter that had bluffed my way out of two or three jams in the past. The only firearms used in the Swamp are shotguns. I knew if I fired my revolver the difference in the sound of its report would notify the hidden Hell-holians within hearing distance that an unwelcome stranger was in their midst. And I didn't want to meet a crowd of the sensitive creatures. All I craved was one guide. But when half-way across a knoll I lost in the darkness even the faint trail I'd been following, there was nothing else to do. Taking a quick sight, I shot two large holes in the moist atmosphere.

The echoes were still chasing each other when, not fifty yards ahead of me, gun under his arm, a native stepped from behind a tree. "What do you want, stranger?"

Figuring he must be pretty deaf if he hadn't heard my shouts at that distance, I asked in a loud, emphatic voice, "How far is it to Monk's Corners?"

"Six mile. But you-all is way off the road."

"Is it possible?" I asked in a much lower, sarcastic tone which I didn't think he could hear.

"It ain't only possible. You *is*."

"Well, well," I said, trying to show him I harbored no ill-will. "Will you be good enough, stranger, to show me the right road?"

"'Twouldn't do no good. You-all couldn't follow it. It's too dark."

He had been walking toward me while we talked. Suddenly I recognized him. It was Zeb Curran, my teacher of etiquette. At that instant a girl darted across the road behind him and disappeared among the trees.

"Mr. Curran," I said, "it's worth ten dollars to me if you'll hop in here alongside me and guide me into the Corners."

"No. It's too stormy. And it's a-going to get worse. I reckon to put you up for the night and show you the road in the morning." He climbed up in the seat and took the reins from my hand. "Finished up with Thornton's new mill?"

"Yes, sir."

"I heard tell he paid a heap of money for it."

An icy chill strayed up my damp spine as I wondered if he'd also "heard tell" I was carrying the last instalment on the engine. He was no friend of the Thorntons.

SEVERAL minutes later he turned off the road and drew up at a shack with a lean-to barn about fifty feet off from the road. Standing in the door, barefooted and bareheaded, were his wife and a girl about sixteen. Without anybody saying a word we unhitched the horse and Curran shook down some feed. Then we went into the house.

It consisted of one room, about twelve by sixteen. On one side there was a fireplace where all the cooking was done. Half of the floor was covered with boards. The rest was bare, the earth packed down as hard as concrete and swept clean as a hospital. In the center of the room was a table, a few chairs and boxes scattered around it. Two double beds in one corner were placed so the foot of one was flush against the side of the other.

I couldn't keep my eyes off Honey Curran. She was pretty and clean, which was where she had it two ways on her mother. She was tall and straight and strapping, with a figure that even the calico Mother Hubbard she wore pulled in around her waist couldn't conceal. Naturally her feet were spread from going barefoot all the time, but there was no fault to be found with her ankles or the scenery immediately above them. She had long, black hair, sleeked and smoothed back over her head, and a pair of eyes, large and clear black, that followed every move I made.

It was easy to see why Skip Thornton let her stick wild flowers in the buttonhole of his shirt, although her beauty wasn't compelling or hypnotic enough to make me ride nine miles and risk receiving a full charge of buckshot just to gaze upon it.

All through supper no one but the head of the family had a word to say, and all Curran did was to ask me questions. I got the feeling that he had a motive behind it all, a feeling which the expression in Honey's eyes only strengthened. I began answering freely but not so frankly.

"What religion do you-all believe in, stranger?" he inquired after we had lighted our pipes.

I knew he was a Davidite. "I'm a Mohammedan," I said, playing safe; "but not what you could call bigoted."

"You been a-going to Jacobite meetings, ain't you?"

"Once," I corrected.

"Um-m. You-all is a friend of Skip Thornton, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Um-m. Stranger!" His voice suddenly hardened. He rose and pointed a bent finger at me. The daughter, drying dishes in the door, stopped and stared at me. The mother straightened up and leaned a dripping hand on the door-casing. A clap of thunder overhead and the crack of a bough split from a tree outside warned me to watch my step.

"Stranger, you-all didn't come along this way *on purpose*, did you?" Honey's eyes were trying to tell me something. "You-all ain't a-carrying messages to nobody, are you?"

There was hot murder in the old man's beady eyes.

"I am not!"

A still second of racking suspense—then the mother doused her hands again in the dish-water. The girl swung her towel busily. Out in the barn a mule brayed. The old man knocked the ashes from his pipe and sat down again in front of the fireplace.

"Reckon it'll storm all night, stranger," he said.

Along about eight o'clock, I saw the old lady start taking off her dress. I only saw her start. I couldn't get my eyes pointed toward the coals in the fireplace quick enough. Two minutes later I heard the creak of bed-springs under heavy pressure. I can generally take a hint, so I stood up and said, "Well, I guess I'll go out in the stable and hit the hay."

"Stranger," the old man remarked, "when I puts up a man in my house I puts him up right. You-all are a-going to sleep in a bed."

I was afraid to insult the family by insisting that I preferred to sleep among the dumb animals outside, but——

While I was still standing, hunting for words, the daughter began to untie the sash around her waist. I sat down and scorched my eyes again. The old man went to the door, latched it, returned to the fire and took off his hat. Then he kicked off his shoes and removed his vest and trousers. Walking over to the bed in the corner he called, "Stranger." I turned. He pulled back the cotton quilt. "Get comfortable," he said. But instead of lying down in it, as I expected, he crawled into the bed where his wife and daughter were.

I waited till the coals died and the room grew dark and then took off my collar, coat, trousers and shoes. I kept on my valuable vest. Also I slipped my .44 under my pillow.

I didn't need the wind shrieking around the eaves to tell me, or the flashes of lightning streaking through the window and glinting off Curran's gun, resting lightly against his pillow, to show me that I had walked into a trap, a trap for which Skip was responsible. There was no longer any doubt in my mind. He had purposely misdirected me.

I was convinced, too, that Honey had expected me, that she had heard my shouts that afternoon, but had feared to answer because she knew her father was watching her. Curran had literally forced me to stay all night at the shack, and had made sure that I would not escape under cover of darkness by insisting that I sleep where he and his wife could watch me every minute.

With the rain pounding down on the shake-roof above and the thunder booming so close I could actually feel it, along toward morning I finally fell into a fevered sleep, shot with dreams in which I fought with Curran for Thornton's money while Honey looked on silently, her big eyes asking me a question I couldn't understand.

THE sun was brightly shining through the door and window when I woke up. The first sight that greeted me was Honey, stooped down by the fire, cooking something in a frying-pan. Her father and mother were nowhere to be seen or heard.

I cleared my throat loudly. "Good morning."

She turned sideways so she could see me. " 'Morning."

I waited for her to say something else or leave the room. Nothing happened. I gazed longingly at my trousers on the chair at the foot of the bed.

"Well," I yawned, trying to break the news as courteously as possible, "I guess I'll get up."

She made no answer; just sat looking at me with her black, starey eyes. You know the queer feeling of trouble, the premonition of danger a fellow sometimes gets. I got it then.

"Where's your mammy and daddy?" I asked, my heart beating thickly.

"Mammy done gone to church. Paw—he's hiding behind that big oak out yonder, a-waiting to kill Skip Thornton."

I recalled Dick Thornton's remark: "Skip ain't going to leave this knoll for quite a spell."

"It's all right," I told the girl. "Skip's not coming here to-day."

"Yes, he is," she replied dully. "He done told me. That's why he sent you-all here. He done say you-all is his friend."

I don't know how many minutes passed: Honey, crouched by the fire, staring at the door, our ears straining, waiting, dreading; I wildly trying to conjure some scheme to warn Skip, to— Sounding sharp as the gunshot we were expecting came the crack of a twig under a stealthy foot. Honey sprang to her feet. A man, bent nearly double, ran in out of the sunshine and dropped to the floor. Cautiously, his head on the ground, he squinted through the door.

"*Skip!*" whispered the girl as he rose, satisfied.

" 'Morning, Honey." He kissed her. "Where-at is——" He saw me. " 'Morning, friend." Without waiting for me to reply, he excitedly took the girl's hand and brought her over to the bedside. "Now, Honey, you-all hear for your sweet self what my friend says the Bible tells 'bout Jacobites and Davidites."

Honey looked at me with hungry eyes. "Friend," Skip pleaded, "tell my Honey how there ain't no sign saying which can and which can't climb up the Golden Stairs."

Tell me love isn't a wonderful thing! Look where it had landed me! The old man under the big oak outside, and those two kids—anyway, I did the best I could for them.

"Skip!" Honey's cry of joy hinted the weight that had been lifted from her heart as she flew across the room into her lover's arms. And, oh, brother, what a weight slid off my chest as I flew out of bed and into my trousers!

"Friend," Skip spoke rapidly, "Honey and me has been a-wishing to marry for a long time. But her being Davidite and me Jacobite there ain't a man in Hell-hole would witness the marriage. That's howcome I gave you wrong directions yesterday. Honey, where-at is your Bible?"

The girl ran to the shelf and brought me the book.

"Let all know," Skip's voice was low and husked, "this woman is now my wife."

"Let all know," Honey's eyes shone straight into Skip's, "this man is now my husband."

"Let all know," I echoed softly, looking through the door at the top of the big oak at the edge of the road, "I have witnessed this marriage."

Dick Thornton's horse, hitched to the buckboard behind the lean-to barn, whinnied. A second later an answering whinny, a whinny of recognition, floated clear on the still air.

"My horse!" Skip breathed. "He's tethered behind that clump of gum down yonder." Like a cat he was at the door, the girl at his shoulder.

"Look! Dad's started to find him," Honey whispered.

"Come on," I urged. "Perhaps we can get away in the buckboard before——"

"No!" Skip thought a second. "When he finds my horse he'll know I'm here. He knows you're still here. He won't try to fight us both. He'll— By God!"

"What!"

"He'll go to the Davidite meeting-house three hundred yards down the road and tell them there's two Jacobites in the house with his gal!" He turned to me. "You-all got your gun?" he quietly asked.

I took it from under the pillow.

Honey had her eye glued to the narrow slit along the casing made by the half-opened door. "Skip!" She was breathing fast. "He—he's found your horse!"

"What's he doing?"

"Standing still—pulling his beard. Now he's looking toward the house. He's coming this way. No! Now he's turning back. He's—he's started down the road to the meeting-house!"

"Come on!" I was shaking with nervousness. "Let's cut and run."

"Can't, friend," Skip hurriedly explained. "You got to get *out* of Hell-hole. You can't go back. My dad's following the back-trail looking for me. And besides, after what Zeb Curran tells them, his friends will scatter and search all the roads. The quickest way out of Hell-hole is the road running past the meeting-house. *That's the way we-all got to go!*"

"All right," I said. "What are we waiting for?"

"Stop!" Honey commanded. She snatched an old cotton shirt of her father's from a nail in the wall and ran toward me. "Change clothes with me! Quick! Give me your coat—and hat." Already she had loosened the sash around her waist and the buttons of her calico Mother Hubbard.

"I don't understa——"

"Don't talk, friend. Please just hurry. Skip and me will get in the buckboard. You go to where Skip's horse is and get on him. If Dad sees you going up the road, he'll think it's me and won't shoot. When Skip and me in the buckboard get to the road and start toward the church, you follow. The folks won't know why you're following us—they'll think it's me—but they'll try not to hit you. That'll protect us all."

She slipped the calico thing off her shoulders and flung it toward me. Buttoning my coat around her, she took from the wall an odd-shaped sort of sunbonnet. "Hurry! Put this on."

"But how can you two in the buckboard hope to outdistance the men who'll follow you on horseback?" I questioned, struggling with the buttons of the dress.

"I reckon I know a way," Honey said grimly. She jammed my hat on her head. "You-all follow we-uns till I beckon, or till—till we-uns can't get no further. Then pass us and keep going. You-all is on the fastest horse in the Swamp, friend. Now, go!"

"Good luck," I said, hastily shaking hands and including myself in my wishes.

Brother, I never felt less like a young girl in my life than when I stepped out into the bright sunlit road with that Mother Hubbard clinging around my bare knees, that foolish hat tied up under my chin, and started toward Skip Thornton's horse. Two hundred yards away was Zeb Curran, making for the meeting-house, glancing back over his shoulder at every step. When he saw me he stopped, shaded his eyes with his hand and—I didn't see what he did after that. I turned my face west and tried to remember to take short, maidenly steps.

No sooner had I untied the horse than I saw the buckboard wheel into the road and dash toward the church. Zeb was nowhere in sight. In a second I had my leg over Skip's animal and was burning up the road after the honeymooners.

I was within twenty yards of them when, directly in front of the church, Honey raised Skip's gun to her shoulder and sent a hail of shot spattering around the door. Skip lashed the horse savagely. My brute jumped and streaked it after the rocking, bouncing buckboard.

I looked back. Men and women were rushing out of the church, the men scurrying toward their mounts, the women crowding about Honey's father. I saw Zeb drop to one knee and sight along the barrel of his gun. I ducked low as the bullets whistled over my head. Before we rounded a bend in the road a dozen men had picked up the chase.

For over half a mile we raced through the woods. Occasional bits of straight road showed the men behind us, steadily gaining. I wondered where Honey was leading us, and whether we'd arrive there before our pursuers caught us. Also I began looking anxiously for her signal to pass on ahead of the buckboard.

Suddenly it came. Digging my heels into my horse's ribs I came quickly alongside.

"Straight ahead—keep going!" Skip shouted.

Galloping around a sharp curve I saw ahead and at one side another small church. The horses, rigs and mules around it were evidence that the service was not yet finished. I pulled up a bit, afraid the frantic pounding of my horse's feet might disturb the worshipers. Glancing back to see whether Skip was observing the same precaution, I saw Honey, gun again to shoulder, wait till she was abreast of the church, and then pour a charge directly into an opened window.

At that instant, a hundred yards back of her, the leaders of the crowd following us roared into view and opened fire. Out of the meeting-house milled twenty men shooting pointblank into the approaching Davidites.

The leader's horse reared, screamed and fell. His rider, lying flat in the road behind the kicking animal, drew a bead on a young giant standing on the top step of the church and pressed the trigger. The giant crumpled. A bellow of rage rising from the Jacobites as they quickly sought firing posts and reached for their shells was answered by the curses of the Davidites seeking shelter behind the trees which lined the road.

I realized suddenly, oddly, that the chase was over. Honey had saved us by starting a religious riot! "Oh, Love Is a Wonderful Thing."

A few minutes later, crossing a stretch of swamp to a knoll which offered two diverging trails, the guns of the two factions piously potting each other sounding dim and faint in the distance, I pulled up to await Skip's direction.

"Friend," he said, "here's where we-all part company. You-all take the buckboard and give me my horse. Two miles ahead is Monk's Corners. The road is straight. You-all can't go wrong."

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"To the little shack I done built for Honey and me." Skip unaffectedly drew his bride's head down on his shoulder.

"But your father? And yours?" I looked at them both.

"They can't do nothing, can they, now we-uns is married?"

"But how are you going to prove you're married?"

"I been studying 'bout that," Skip replied. "Friend, give me a cartridge out of that there pistol of yourn."

Wondering, I did so. Skip took his knife from his pocket. "Honey, you-all make your mark on this." She scratched in the bullet a small circle with a dot in the center. Taking the cartridge from her, Skip drew the two short, horizontal lines which was his mark.

"Now, friend, if you-all will put your mark on this, I reckon nobody can say you-all didn't witness our marriage."

As I scratched in the letters F. B. O. W. and the date, I saw Skip's argument. Mine was the only revolver in Hell-hole.

"Friend," Skip wrapped a huge hand around mine, "I reckon Honey and me owes you a heap. I sure do wish we-all could do something——"

"You can," I interrupted. Drawing him to one side I whispered, "Ask your wife if she'll—er, ask Honey if she wouldn't mind—if she'd give me— Skip, old man, after all we've been through—" my voice broke in spite of me—"surely you're not going to ask me to drive out of Hell-hole Swamp without any trousers on!"

PAUL removed his feet from my desk and helped himself to a fresh cigar. "Did I ever tell you about the time on Frisco Bay——"

"Hold on a second," I checked him. "You say you scratched on the bullet the letters F. B. O. W. What do they stand for?"

"'For Better Or Worse.' That's on all marriage certificates, isn't it? I wanted that wedding to be as legal and proper as possible. Skip was my friend."

Do you remember the county fair of another day, it's ballyhoo experts, its "wise" racing men and the thrilling 2.10 pace?

"Oh Ballyhoo!" By Paul Everman

Is the sort of story to revive these memories—to make you glad that you haven't always lived in a crowded city. In

September EVERYBODY'S *Out August 15*

The Rider of Golden Bar*

Crocker County's Invisible Government Resorts to Desperate Measures and the New Sheriff Figures in an Abduction

By William Patterson White

Author of "Paradise Bend," "Hidden Trails," "Lynch Lawyers," etc.

Illustrations by Remington Schuyler

WHEN Hazel Walton implored Billy Wingo to resign as the newly elected sheriff of Crocker County, her trepidation would have been magnified had she known, instead of divined, the perils he was about to face. His obstinate refusal to consider quitting was met by her equally obstinate refusal to marry a man whose life was in constant danger. Her attitude provoked Billy to wrath and to the statement that he had asked her to marry him for the last time. "If ever you change your mind," he said, "you'll have to come to me and tell me that I was right and you were wrong."

Billy hadn't wanted the honor of the job so much as the opportunity it provided for marrying Hazel, but once in power he determined to do his whole duty despite the opposition of the corrupt political ring which had obtained his election in the expectation that once in office he could be easily managed.

His first official act was to be the appointment of deputies, and Tip O'Gorman, Nestor of the powers that controlled county political matters, immediately made overtures. In exchange for accepting Tip's appointees, the new sheriff was to receive certain perquisites amounting to about ten thousand dollars a year in addition to his salary. Billy listened attentively to the details of the proposition, only to explain, on its conclusion, that his deputies were already appointed and, to Tip's consternation, actually present, in concealment, as witnesses to his offer, which they had taken down in writing. Tip was not to be turned over to justice, however.

"There's no use in scaring off the flock to down one bird," was Billy's comment as he closed the interview, "we'll just file away these remarks for future reference. We can afford to wait."

Although O'Gorman was still hopeful of getting Billy to see the light, his methods were too easy-going, too slow and too human to satisfy such case-hardened souls as Rafe Tuckleton and Skinny Shindle, land swindlers and dealers in stolen cattle, and their faithful allies, Justice-of-the-Peace Driver and Arthur Rale, the district attorney. If the new sheriff was disposed to put obstacles in the way of their crooked schemes then he must be removed as thoroughly and expeditiously as possible. To that end, Tuckleton and Shindle, who had another grudge to settle with Tom Walton, Hazel's father, called in Dan Slike, a professional gunman. They came to terms and perfected a plan.

To the sheriff's office one stormy winter morning came Simon Reelfoot, one of the ring's henchmen, with a story that two of his cows had been shot by mysterious strangers. He had scarcely finished when Judge Driver appeared with a portfolio of documents and the suggestion that Wingo's two deputies investigate Reelfoot's complaint while he and the sheriff discussed an impending case. To this Billy readily

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assented. Scarcely had his deputies disappeared with Reelfoot when Skinny Shindle dropped in with a note from Hazel Walton asking Billy to come at once to her father's ranch.

The well-laid plan to get the sheriff separated from his deputies and away from his office was slightly overdone. In the first place, Billy's suspicions were aroused by Reelfoot's furtive actions and the nicely-timed arrival of his succeeding visitors. Then he happened to know that Hazel was that day visiting friends on a distant ranch, knowledge that led him to scrutinize closely her note and recognize it as a forgery. By no outward sign did he betray these suspicions until he suddenly informed the judge that they were to set out at once for the Walton ranch, but not until they had exchanged clothes and Driver was mounted on a pinto pony that would be everywhere recognized as the sheriff's. The thoroughly frightened judge protested in vain; Billy disclosed the fact that his deputies had not accompanied Reelfoot, but were waiting just outside the door of his office, and presently all four were on their way to Walton's.

Before they were in sight of the house, Wingo went forward alone on foot, concealing himself with a sheet that made him indistinguishable in the snow. Through the kitchen window he made out the body of Tom Walton lying on the floor while Dan Slike, the gunman, waited on the alert for the next victim—himself. At a pre-arranged signal Billy's deputies released Driver, who galloped up to the house begging Slike at the top of his voice not to shoot. Slike admitted the craven judge and immediately began to berate him for having spoiled their plans. Billy, taking advantage of their distracted attention, thrust his gun through the window and demanded their surrender, whereupon Slike, thinking he had been double-crossed, shot and killed Driver before he himself dropped unconscious with four of Billy's bullets in his neck and shoulders.

"WELL," said the district attorney, "you can't hold this man on any such biased evidence as this."

"But you see I am holding him," pointed out Billy Wingo.

"They'll get him out on a writ of habeas corpus."

"They? Who's they?"

"His friends. I suppose the man has friends."

"Oh, yes," acquiesced Billy, "the man has friends. Too many friends."

The district attorney looked away. "You'd better let him escape—or something," he suggested brazenly. "We—we mustn't be made ridiculous, you know."

"We? We? Don't get me mixed up with you, Rale. I'm particular who I bracket with, sort of. Another thing, the last time you were in here you went out on your head, remember? Well, lemme point out that you're here, I'm here, so's the door, and history is just the same thing over again."

The close-set little eyes wavered. "I tell you, Wingo, the case looks black for you, too."

Billy Wingo rolled and lit a placid cigaret before he spoke. "Black? For me?"—inquiringly.

"I'm afraid so."

"You mean you hope so. Go on."

"There are a great many strange things about the whole affair. For instance, why was Judge Driver wearing your clothes when the bodies were found? If, as you say, you saw the whole thing, why did you not prevent the murder? How do we know that you did not kill both Tom Walton and the judge and then lay the blame on this stranger?"

"You don't know," admitted Billy. "That's the worst of it. But you will know. Yeah, you will know."

"I intend to look into your side of the case very closely, Wingo," declared the district attorney. "It may be that everything has not yet been told."

"There is more in this than meets the eye," nodded Billy. "Considerable more."

"If you persist in holding this man for a hearing," said Rale impressively, "it may—will, I should say—involve you. I'd hate to see you get into trouble."

"I'll bet you would," Billy concurred warmly. "You'd hate it like you do your left eye. But I'm gonna gamble with you. I'll hold the man till the judge decides what to do."

"In that case, I'll send for Judge Clasp at once."

"Why Judge Clasp? Why bother that old gent?"

"Because Driver's dead," the district attorney explained impatiently. "We have to have a judge to hold the hearing."

"Oh, I know all about that. I've sent for one."

"Who?"

"Judge Donelson."

"But he's the Federal judge, and he lives way over in Hillsville," objected Rale. "Judge Clasp is nearer. In a case of this kind, when the judge of a district is unavailable, the nearest judge takes over the district. The statutes——"

"The statutes say 'any judge,'" interrupted Billy Wingo. "On this point I am quite clear. I looked it up to make sure. 'Any judge' means 'any judge.' Nothing else. And you know that Judge Donelson is a territorial as well as a Federal judge. Technicalities can't pull your wagon out of this hole, Arthur, old settler."

"I shall send for Judge Clasp at once," bumbled Arthur, old settler.

"If you send right away, he should be here by day after to-morrow. Yep, day after to-morrow at the earliest."

"Judge Donelson can't get here till the day after that," said Rale triumphantly.

"Oh, he can't, can't he?" smiled Billy. "Unless he has an accident he'll be here to-morrow. You see, Arthur, I started Riley Tyler off to Hillsville ten minutes after I arrested Slike. That's why I'm gamblin' that Judge Donelson will get here first."

The district attorney openly lost his temper. "I don't regard the evidence as given sufficient for indictment. I shall ask the judge not to hold him."

"Don't do anything rash, Arthur. Remember the hearing will be at the Walton ranch to-morrow afternoon."

"The Walton ranch! It'll be held here in Driver's office, that's where it will be held."

"Not a-tall. I want Judge Donelson to see the layout. Then he'll be able to tell better what's what. The Walton ranch to-morrow afternoon. Don't forget."

"YOUR Honor, I don't see how this man can be held," protested the district attorney. "I claim that the sheriff's testimony is biased. How do we know that it wasn't the sheriff himself who murdered both men and wounded Slike?"

"You can easily see, Judge," put in the coroner smoothly, "how flimsy the evidence is against the prisoner. It is practically his word against the sheriff's. The prisoner has explained everything—how he was coming to the ranch on business and was arrested by the sheriff the minute he stepped inside the doorway. Why, your Honor, it's the plainest open-and-shut case I ever saw. Absolutely nothing to it."

"The coroner's right," boomed the district attorney. "And I hereby ask that Dan Slike be released from custody and—" he paused dramatically.

"Well—" prompted Judge Donelson, his old eyes inscrutable.

"And I feel it my duty to charge the sheriff, William H. Wingo, with the murder of Thomas Walton, the murder of Judge Driver, and assault with intent to kill upon Daniel Slike."

"Didn't the coroner's jury bring in a verdict of 'at the hands of persons unknown'?" inquired Judge Donelson.

"They did," admitted the district attorney, "but it was in direct opposition to the evidence. Indeed, the coroner instructed the jurymen otherwise."

"Then he exceeded his duty. But that by the way. They jury brought in a 'persons unknown' verdict. However, I do not agree with the jury."

"I knew you would not," the district attorney cried triumphantly.

"No, I believe the person is known. Sheriff, will you tell us in your own words how you happened to be on hand in time to be a witness of the murder of Judge Driver?"

Like so may trained seals those present turned their heads to stare at the sheriff. Some eyes were friendly, some noncomittal, but the majority were unfriendly. This was because the crowd consisted largely of county office-holders. Billy gave a straightforward and detailed account of everything that had led up to the murder of Judge Driver.

As he concluded his story Judge Donelson nodded a slow head. "Why did you not immediately enter the ranch-house after you looked in the window and saw the boot soles of the dead man?"

"Judge," said Billy with a whimsical smile, "suppose now you went out hunting and you wanted to get more than one deer and had only one cartridge, what would you do—shoot the first deer you saw or wait till you got two in line?"

"I see," nodded the judge. "I see. Still, Sheriff, there is the word of Dan Slike. It would have been better had you had another witness."

"Another witness?" said Billy. "If that's all you want, I have one. Riley Tyler, stand up."

The younger deputy stood up and was duly sworn. He deposed that the sheriff's match signal to Guerilla Melody to send the judge down to the house had been also a signal to him, Riley Tyler, to come down from the flat and take position under the window directly opposite the one at which the sheriff was posted. All this had taken place according to plan. Riley Tyler had heard every word uttered by both the judge and Dan Slike and had also seen Slike shoot the judge. Furthermore, he had talked with the Federal deputy marshal in Hillsville and learned that the marshal had never even thought of asking Judge Driver to approach the sheriff concerning the alleged bootlegging activities of Jake Kilroe.

Riley Tyler concluded his testimony and sat down, taking occasion as he did so to wink at the district attorney. The latter glared back with frank dislike.

"The evidence I have just heard," said Judge Donelson, "is clear. There is no shred, jot or tittle of it that throws suspicion on Sheriff Wingo. I will hold Daniel Slike for the grand jury. If Judge Driver were alive, I would hold him as accessory before and after the fact. Do you still think, Mr. Rale, that Mr. Wingo should be held?"

"Why—uh—uh—" stalled the district attorney.

"Tell me," persisted Judge Donelson, "exactly what you think?"

But the district attorney did not dare tell Judge Donelson anything like that. Instead he said, with a smile he strove to make natural and pleasant:

"Hold Mr. Wingo? Certainly not. I have misjudged him. I am sure he will not bear malice against me."

"Hold it against Mr. Rale?" said Billy with the straightest face in the world. "Certainly not. I have misjudged him. But I am sure he will not bear malice against me."

Even the judge smiled.

Dan Slike, lying on an improvised bed of blankets in the corner of the room, raised his head. "You'll never hang me, y'understand," said Dan Slike. "And you ain't got a jail in the territory big enough to hold me after I get shut of these scratches. I'll see you later, Sheriff."

Dan Slike added a curse or two and relapsed into silence. Not a likable person, Mr. Slike. No, not at all.

"THIS," said Rafe Tuckleton, "is a helluva note."

"It's all your fault," the district attorney recriminated bitterly.

"You did most of it," flung back Rafe, always an enthusiastic player at the great game known as passing the buck. "You know damn well——"

"Who thought of it first?" interrupted the district attorney. "Who was the bright li'l feller, I'd like to know?"

"Don't you try to ride me," snarled the genial Rafe. "Dontcha do it."

"Aw, shut up, you gimme a pain! Gawd, and I'll bet your parents thought you was just too cunnin' for anything. It's a shame they let you live. To think of all the fatal accidents that might have happened to you and didn't almost makes a feller lose his faith in Providence. 'Oh, yes,' says you, 'Wingo will walk into the trap with his eyes shut. It'll be just too easy.' "

"Well, the first part worked all right," protested Rafe Tuckleton. "Dan downed Walton without any trouble. How could I tell Driver would slip up on his part? I'm glad Slike downed him. Served him right for being a fool. Reelfoot did his part all right, too."

"How do we know Reelfoot did? How do we know what happened before the fracas at Walton's? We don't. We don't know anything except that Tom Driver is dead, Dan Slike wounded and in the calaboose, and Skinny Shindle has skedaddled."

"Skinny tell any one where he was goin'?"

"He did not. Soon as he heard that infernal Bill Wingo had pulled through without a hole in him, Skinny saddled his horse and went some'ers else awhoopin'. And I don't think he expects to come back. Oh, it's a fine mix-up all round, a fine mix-up."

"Sh-sh," cautioned Rafe. "Somebody coming—oh, it's you, Tip. 'Lo."

"Yeah, it's me, Tip," said O'Gorman. closing the door carefully and sitting down on the only vacant chair. "Look here, Rafe, what did I tell you about downing Tom Walton?"

"I ain't downed Tom Walton," denied Rafe sullenly.

"You had it done," insisted O'Gorman.

"How do you know I did?" dodged Rafe.

"By the way it was gormed up."

"I suppose now if you'd planned it——"

"I wouldn't have planned it in the first place. I told you to keep your paws off, and now look at the damn thing."

"It wasn't my fault," barked back Rafe.

"Can't you say anything different?" the district attorney threw in drearily.

"You don't even seem able to obey orders any more," said Tip O'Gorman.

"I don't have to take orders from you," flared up Rafe.

"No, you don't have to. Nobody has to do anything they don't want to. But we've decided, Rafe, that hereafter you sit on the tail-board. You don't pick up the lines again, see."

"Who's we?" demanded Rafe.

"Craft, Larder and myself."

"You can't do anything!" Contemptuously.

"No? For one thing, we can keep you from shipping so much as a single cow."

"How?"

"Our ranges surround you on three sides, and where we don't fit in, the mountains do. You can't drive through the mountains and we won't let you drive through us. That's how."

"Huh?"

"Yeah, it's root, hog or die, feller. You gonna be good?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Good enough. One slip on your part and you know what happens, Rafe. Bear it in mind, and it'll be money in your pocket."

"You talk like a minister."

"I wish I was one, preaching the funeral sermon over your grave. Lord, what a stinking skunk you are, Rafe!"

"Look here——"

"Blah! You are a skunk. So crazy after money you had to go and hurt li'l Hazel Walton. Damn your soul, I told you not to do anything to hurt her! And you bulled right ahead! You lousy packrat, you've broken that child's heart! She thought the world and all of her uncle, she did. I tell you, Rafe, you ain't fit to drink with a Digger or eat with a dog!"

"I ain't gonna fight with you," declared Rafe Tuckleton.

"I was hoping you would," averred Tip. "There'd be one tom-fool less to worry about if you did."

"No, I can wait," said Rafe with a feline grin.

"Oh, I'll be watching you, you rattlesnake," nodded Tip.

"Go easy, you two!" snapped the district attorney, as a dog in the next room began to bark. "There's somebody comin' up the path."

The squabble went dead.

"Good thing the wind's yowlin' its head off to-night," observed Tip O'Gorman. "I forgot myself for a shake."

Rafe Tuckleton looked at the floor. There was venom in his heart and death in his thoughts.

Tip O'Gorman fingered out the makings. He was shaking in the tobacco when Billy Wingo opened the door and strode without ceremony into the office. He was followed by Riley Tyler. The latter slammed the door behind him and set his back against it.

"Three li'l friends together," said Billy, his eyes gleaming at them beneath the peak of his fur cap. "I saw your light as I was passing, Arthur, and I thought I'd sift in and thank you for all those kind words of yours yesterday. I appreciated 'em, you bet. You, too, Rafe, did about as well as could be expected. Tip is the only one I can't thank."

He smiled lazily on Tip. The latter grinned back.

"It ain't my fault you can't," returned Tip cryptically.

Billy nodded, although naturally he did not grasp the other's meaning, and said: "Got another li'l matter for you gentlemen. Finding you all together thisaway is gonna save me trouble. I'm in luck to-night."

"Aw, spit it out!" Rafe directed rudely.

Billy looked pained. "Our long-faced li'l playmate seems all fussed up over something. Well, boys will be boys, I suppose, and burned fingers now and then have got to be expected."

He paused and regarded them gravely.

Rafe's answering stare was darkling, the district attorney's uncomfortable, while Tip's was impersonal.

"I hope you boys are feeling generous to-night," resumed Billy.

Rafe Tuckleton stole a glance at O'Gorman. Generous?

"The fact is," went on the calm voice, "I'm takin' up a collection—a collection for Tom Walton's niece, Hazel."

Billy thought that at the mention of the ranchman's name both the district attorney and Tuckleton stiffened their slouching bodies, but he could not be positive. The lamp on the table gave a poor, weak light.

"Her uncle's gettin' downed thisaway will be a bad blow for her. He was all she had. Y'understand now—the girl won't ever know that this is any benefit like. She mustn't ever know. It's insurance on Tom's life, see? Sam Prescott was keepin' the policy for him in his safe. Tom must have forgot to tell her about it. That's what Sam's going to tell her. How much will you boys give?"

Tip O'Gorman did not hesitate. "You can put us down for a thousand apiece."

"*What!*" chorused the district attorney and Rafe Tuckleton.

The sheriff cocked an eyebrow at the two men. "You think it's too little? Well, I guess maybe you're right. A thousand is enough for Tip here, but you two are rich men. Say twice that—two thousand from each of you will be about right."

The two rich men were speechless. But only for a moment.

"Two thousand!" gasped Rafe. "Not a nickel."

"Not a thin dime!" contradicted the district attorney.

"Say not so!" said Billy Wingo.

Tip O'Gorman nodded. "'Say not so,' is right."

Billy looked at the speaker approvingly. "I'm glad Tip agrees with me. I'll take the money in gold, greenbacks and silver. No drafts."

The district attorney squealed like a stuck pig. "No nothing you mean! Whadda you think we are?"

"A couple of rascals," was the prompt reply. "And there's a tax on rascals. *That li'l girl has got to be taken care of.*"

Billy's voice was earnest. But a sardonic devil looked out of his eyes. He yearned with a great yearning for the district attorney and Rafe Tuckleton to join battle with him. He knew that he could easily take care of both. Tip O'Gorman was the unknown quantity. One could never be quite sure what Tip was thinking. One thing, Tip was neither a murderer nor a dealer in murder. That had never been Tip's way. And something told Billy that in the present crisis Tip would keep his hands off. The issue lay strictly between Rafe, the district attorney and Billy Wingo.

The district attorney by a great effort recovered his mental balance. "You are threatening," he mumbled lamely.

"Not a-tall," returned Billy. "I only said you and Rafe are a couple of rascals. What's fairer than that, I'd like to know?"

"It's blackmail—extortion," the district attorney trotted on.

"Blackmail and extortion to subscribe money for the support of a girl whose uncle has been murdered? No, no, you don't mean it, Arthur, old settler. You mean that you and Rafe will be glad to do your parts. That's what you mean."

"No." Thus Rafe Tuckleton.

"Yes—and again, yes. Three times in fact. Rafe, how about that last deal of yours with the Indian agent? Remember it? The agent, y'understand, gets drunk sometimes, and a drunk will talk. Ever thought of that?"

If Rafe had not thought of that he thought of it now.

"And how about that last bribe you took?" pressed Billy, turning accusingly on the district attorney.

The immediate shrinkage in the form of the district attorney was plainly visible to the naked eye. He went a trifle paler, too.

"Do I get the two thousand apiece for Hazel Walton, Arthur?" demanded Billy.

"Why-uh—yes, yes, of course. I'd always intended to contribute. I was just fooling. Yes."

"And you, Rafe?"

Rafe Tuckleton nodded a reluctant head. "I'll pay."

"That's fine," said Billy heartily. "I'll be around to-morrow for the money."

Rafe Tuckleton did not attempt to demur at the shortness of time as he had done with Dan Slike. He recognized the utter futility of arguing with a man like Billy Wingo.

"By the way," said Billy, staring hard at Rafe Tuckleton, "I wonder if it was any part of Dan Slike's plan to kill Miss Walton, too?"

Rafe's face went wooden. "How should I know?"

Billy nodded. "I was just wonderin'. No harm in that, I suppose. Lucky she wasn't there alla same."

"It was lucky," stated Tip O'Gorman. "Do you know I've been doing a li'l wondering myself. Why wasn't she there?"

"She just happened to be visiting the Prescotts'," replied Billy Wingo, his eyes on Rafe's face.

Rafe did his best to return the stare, but his eyes would drop despite his best effort.

"You know that letter from Miss Walton Judge Driver threw in the fire—the one you heard me telling Judge Donelson about?" went on Billy. "Yeah, that one. It might have fooled me—I'm only human, you know, if——"

"You're too modest," Tip interrupted dryly.

"If it hadn't been for one or two li'l things," resumed Billy. "The handwriting was a fine imitation—you couldn't beat it. But I knew she hadn't written it." He paused, and began to roll a cigaret.

Rafe Tuckleton passed his tongue across his lips. The district attorney looked down at his locked hands. Of the three Tip O'Gorman was the only one to remain his natural self.

"G'on," urged Tip, "give it a name."

"You see," said Billy, "Skinny Shindle told me Miss Walton gave him the note about 2.30 P.M. Now on that afternoon I happened to be at the Prescott ranch. Miss Walton was there visiting Miss Prescott. I didn't leave the Prescott's till nearly three o'clock, and Miss Walton was still there and intending to spend the night. That's how I knew she couldn't have written that note."

"Nine miles from Prescott's to Walton's," said Tip.

"Nearer ten," corrected Billy. "Skinny was sure careless. So were several other men. You've got to make things fit."

He nodded kindly to the company and abruptly departed with his companion.

"I wonder what he meant by making 'things fit,'" mused the district attorney, following five minutes' silence.

"I dunno," Rafe mumbled in accents of the deepest gloom, "but you can put down a bet he meant something."

"He did," declared Tip O'Gorman, "and I'm telling you two straight, flat and final, you ain't fit to play checkers with a blind man. It makes a feller ashamed to do business with you, you're so thumb-handed, tumble-footed foolish. At the time the note was written from Walton's the girl was at Prescott's. Oh, great! And he knew it alla time. And you two jokes wondered why your scheme fell through! You know now, don't you? Gawd! What a pair you are! Oh, I've always believed that a man makes his own li'l hell. Whatever devilishness he does on this earth he pays for on this earth. You fellers are already beginning to pay."

Thus Tip O'Gorman, the moralist. He departed wrapped in a virtuous silence. He did not dare let the others know the actual worry that rode his soul. He knew it was only a matter of time when Billy Wingo would be camping on his trail, too. Lord, how he'd been fooled! He had never suspected that the sheriff possessed such capabilities. And how had the sheriff learned of that flour deal between Rafe and the Indian agent. The flour was supposed to have been bought through another man. Rafe had not appeared in the affair at all, yet Billy Wingo knew all about it.

And the bribe taken by the district attorney. There was another odd chance. Besides the two principals, Rafe Tuckleton and himself, Tip had not supposed that any one knew of the matter. It was very mysterious.

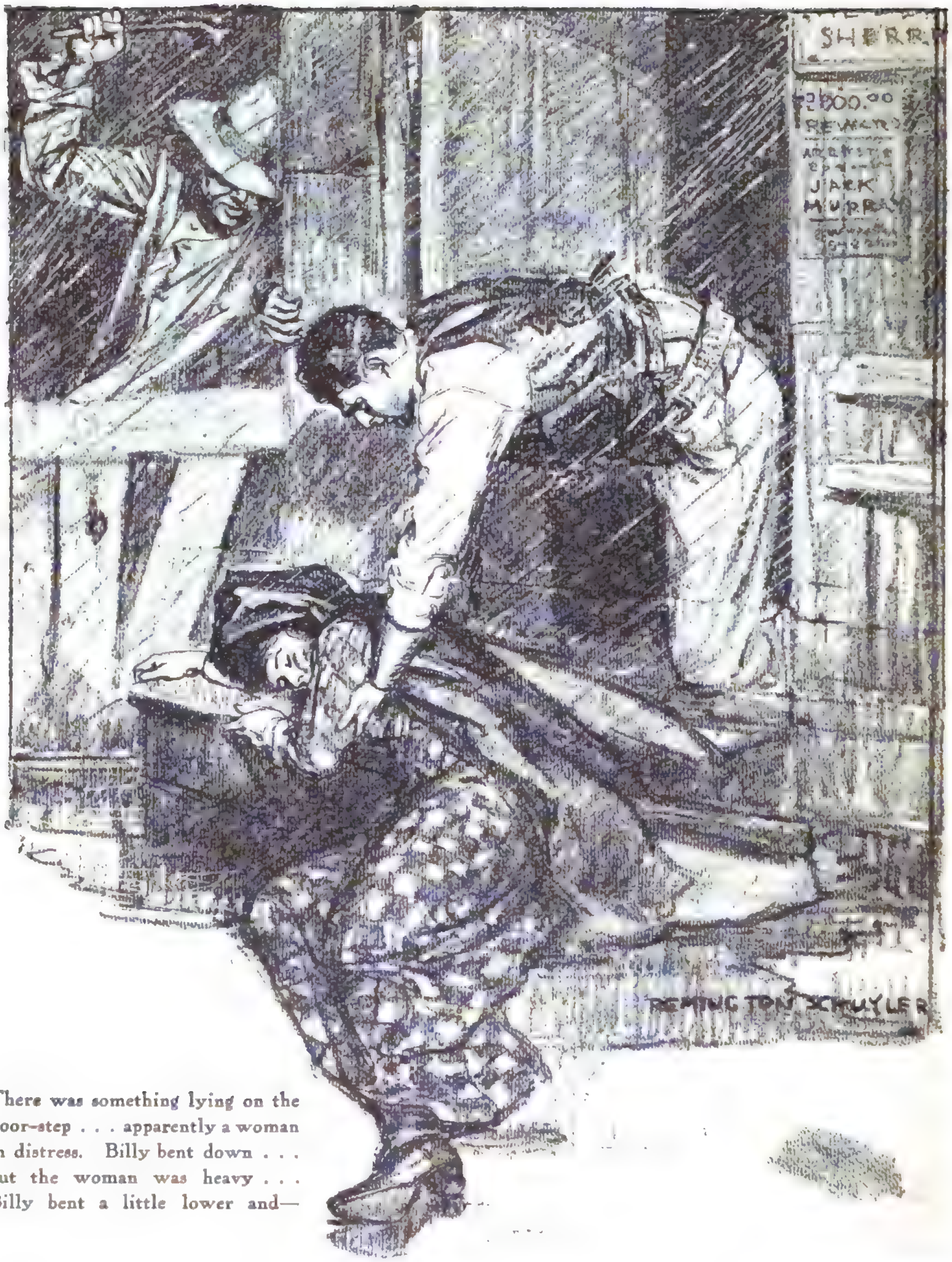
Tip could have kicked himself. If only he had not proposed the election of Billy Wingo—but he had proposed it, and now look at the result!

"SAY, BILL," said the greatly impressed Riley Tyler on the way to the office, "what's this about that deal of Rafe's with the Indian agent? You never said anything about it before."

"Good reason," grinned Billy, "it just occurred to me."

"Occurred to you?" puzzled Riley.

"Yeah, I don't actually know of any deal between Rafe and that thief of an agent; but knowing Rafe and knowing the agent, I



There was something lying on the door-step . . . apparently a woman in distress. Billy bent down . . . but the woman was heavy . . . Billy bent a little lower and—

guessed likely they had been mixed up together in a business way. Seems I guessed right. Same with the district attorney, only easier. If he's taken one bribe, he's taken forty. Wouldn't be Arthur Rale if he hadn't."

Riley Tyler chuckled. "Poker is one fine game," said Riley Tyler.

At the office they found Shotgun Shillman.

"What luck?" asked Billy.

"Plenty," was the reply. "We went to the Cayley cabin first. Nobody livin' there. Ashes in the fireplace might have been a week or a month old. But the balsam tips in the bunks were older than that.

They were last summer's cutting—all stiffer than a porcupine's quills."

"As I remember that cabin," reflected Billy, "the balsam grew all around it."

"They still do. We found a quarter of beef hanging on a stub back of the house. 'There,' says Simon, 'there's proof for you.' 'Yes,' I says, 'le's see the cow it came off of.' 'Whatsa use?' says Simon. 'Lots,' I says. 'C'mon.' He did reluctant, bellowing alla time how we'd oughta follow the tracks leading away from the house toward the Hillsville trail a mile away."

"Were those tracks made by one man?" inquired Billy.

"Looked so to me—anyway, we went along on the line of tracks leading to the dead cow. It had been shot all right enough. It oughta been shot. It had big-jaw."

" 'You mean to tell me them fellers cut that quarter off a big-jaw cow?' I says to Simon. 'Sure,' he says. 'Aw right,' I says. 'Let it go at that.' I poked around to find the other cow, Simon raising objections alla time to me wastin' so much time and trying to get me off the trail. Oh, he didn't care a whoop about me finding the second cow. Wasn't one enough? Oh, sure, to hear him talk! But I found the cow. It hadn't been shot a-tall. Died of the yallers last fall. And it had just about half rotted before freezing weather set in. 'I suppose,' I says sarcastic, 'both cows were killed about the same time.' 'You've guessed it,' says Simon bold as brass. 'Now all you gotta do is chase right along back to the cabin and take up the trail like I wanted you to do in the first place and trail 'em down.' He acted real disappointed when I left him standin' there and came away. I'd have arrested him right then only you said not to."

"Good enough," approved Billy. "Plenty of time to arrest him later. I want to give him plenty of rope. One of these days I'll get a subpena from Judge Donelson and serve it on him. That'll give him plenty of time to think things over between now and the trial."

"Simon ain't the kind to take things easy," mused Shotgun Shillman.

"He'll fret his head off. About the time Slike is well enough to stand prosecution Simon Reelfoot will be ready to bust."

But the well-known best-laid plans are more breakable than the equally well-known best-laid eggs.

"I TELL you, Rafe," said Reelfoot in a panic, "they suspect me—they think I'm mixed up in this murder business."

"Accessory before and after the fact," slipped in the district attorney. A reptile himself, he relished the wrigglings of another reptile. "If they prove it on you, you'll be hanged sure as Dan Slike will hang."

"I ain't the only one they can prove it on," snarled Simon Reelfoot.

"Who have you got in mind?" Rafe Tuckleton said in a colorless voice.

"Both of you, for instance," Reelfoot informed him.

"You do us a grave injustice." Thus the district attorney solemnly.

Rafe Tuckleton shook his head at Simon. "Wrong tree. You don't know anything about us."

Simon Reelfoot gaped at both of them. "Why, we fixed it up between us. You know we did. You even wanted two cows killed so's to make it look lifelike to the deputies."

Rafe looked at the district attorney. "The man's mad."

Simon's teeth snapped together like a cornered coyote. "If you're trying to put this thing all off on me—" he began, and stopped.

"We're not trying to put anything off on you," the district attorney told him silkily. "There's nothing to put off on you, anyway. Not a thing. You're nervous, that's all, Simon. Your imagination is working overtime."

"Sure is," corroborated Rafe. "You don't think we've got anything to do with the murder of Tom Walton, do you, Simon?"

The Reelfoot jaw dropped. The man stared helplessly at Rafe and the district attorney. "Whatell did— Say, what else was all that rigamarole for then?"

"What rigamarole?" Oh, so patient was the voice of Rafe Tuckleton.

Reelfoot gulped. "You had me go to Wingo's office and rile him up, and spin him a lot of jerkwater stuff about my rustled cows, so's to get him and his deputies all ready to go away with me, when Driver was to come in with that stuff about Kilroe and keep Bill in town while the deputies went with me. Well, you know how only Shillman went. But I couldn't help that. Anyway, I suppose you thought you was foxy not to tell me the rest of the story about Skinny Shindle and the fake letter and so forth. Gents, you was foxy. Yeah, you was foxy. But I'm foxy myself. I can put two and two together and make four any day."

He paused and glared at the pair of them. "I wondered what it was all about. Yeah, I wondered, and I asked you and you said it was to keep Bill Wingo from mixing into a li'l stock deal. Stock deal!" Here Simon spat upon the floor. "Stock deal!" rushed on Simon. "You never said it was murder."

Rafe Tuckleton and the district attorney exchanged wooden looks.

"Now that you mention it," said Rafe, "I don't believe we did."

"I thought you didn't like Tom Walton," observed the district attorney.

Simon Reelfoot swore a string of oaths. "I didn't like him, not a bit. But I don't want to be hung for helping having him killed."

"That would be unfortunate," murmured the district attorney.

"I ain't sorry he was killed, of course," Simon fretted on, unheeding. "That part was all right, but I didn't want to be mixed up in it. There's no sense in doing a thing like that if you're gonna be caught. And I don't mean to be caught! You didn't have no right to get me into this deal without telling me all the circumstances first," he concluded weakly.

"Then you think you've been badly treated?" purred the district attorney.

"I know it," declared Simon.

"I'm sorry."

"I didn't come here for sympathy."

"What did you come for?"

"Protection. What do you s'pose? You've gotta protect me."

"Listen to him, Rafe. Says we gotta protect him. That new brand of whisky at George's place is certainly awful stuff. If you'll take my advice, Simon, you'll go a li'l easy on it till your system gets used to it."

"Yeah, sosh up by degrees like," offered Rafe.

"Look here," said the exasperated Reelfoot, "either you fellers pull suspicion off o' me, or I go to Wingo with the whole story."

"What'll that get you?" demanded Rafe. "Nothin'—just nothin'. Wild tales of dead cows and separatin' Bill from his deputies and all ain't evidence. Nawsir. Think again, brother, think again."

"And, anyway," tucked in the district attorney, "what was wrong with the wild tale? It came straight enough. There were the tracks and there were the cows. Who can say your story wasn't the truth?"

"I tell you, they *know* it ain't the truth."

"How do they know?"

Simon did not make immediate reply. It was the worst thing he could have done.

"Well?" prompted Rafe.

"They—uh—uh—they know it."

"How, I asked you?"

"They didn't—Shillman got suspicious over the cows."

"Why did he get suspicious over the cows?"

Simon Reelfoot wriggled in his chair. "Well—uh—I—he did, that's all."

Rafe leaned forward. His face was sharp with suspicion. "*Why did he?*"

"I—I—" Simon stammered and bogged down right there.

"C'mon," directed Rafe inexorably. "Spit it out."

"One of the cows had big-jaw," admitted Reelfoot.

Rafe sucked in his breath.

"What did the other one have?" almost whispered the district attorney.

"The other one died of the yallers last fall," said Reelfoot in a voice that matched the district attorney's. "But," he added hastily, "it come on to freeze soon after. I—I sort o' hated to kill two *good* cows."

"Seeing that two *good* cows were all you were putting up in return for the benefits you would derive from the—uh—political situation, you could have afforded to lose them." Thus the district attorney, staring at Reelfoot.

The latter looked with sullen foreboding at Rafe. The Tuckleton face was bloated with rage.

"So that's how it is!" he choked out. "You had your orders and you muddled them out of rank meanness! Too stingy to kill a couple of healthy cows, you hadda risk everything with one that died last year and another with big-jaw! And then, after you've got 'em suspectin' you good and strong through what's first, last, and only your own fault, you come to us for help!"

"Where else could I go?" queried Reelfoot sulkily.

"To hell for all I care, you half-witted fool! A big-jaw steer! And the other one half rotten, I'll bet!"

"I didn't think he'd notice it," defended Simon.

"You didn't think! No, I'll gamble you didn't! You never have! You couldn't! My Gawd, you deserve to be hung! I hope you are!"

"You forget, Rafe," said the district attorney, "that you and I don't know what all Mr. Reelfoot is driving at."

But Rafe Tuckleton was too angry to keep up the farce any longer. "I hope the fool's hung!" he panted.

"I'll take care not to go alone," said Reelfoot, pressing his advantage. "You fellers will have to see that I'm protected or I'll tell what I know."

"Blah!" blared the district attorney. "You wouldn't dare snitch!"

"I'll dare more than that to save my skin," Reelfoot declared hardily.

Rafe Tuckleton returned to the charge. "What in so-and-so and such-and-such did you do such a fool trick for? Don't you know—couldn't you—oh, whatsa use?"

"You oughta told me all the circumstances," persisted Reelfoot. "That was *your* fault. If I'd knowed, I could have managed better."

"I expect—you—couldn't," said Rafe Tuckleton with an appreciable pause after each word.

"What you gonna do about it?" Reelfoot wanted to know, fidgeting in his chair.

"You'll be taken care of now, you needn't to worry."

"Oh, fine, fi-ine. That helps a lot, that does, with either Bill Wingo or one of his deputies over to my place about every other day snoopin' round and talking to my men."

"They do that, do they?"

"Yes, they do that."

"What of it?" demanded Rafe. "They can't find out anything, can they? You weren't fool enough to let on to your men—your foreman or anybody, were you?"

"Sure not. But——"

"But what?"

"I don't like 'em slouchin' round this way. You dunno what'll happen. They might find out somethin', you can't tell."

"If you didn't tell any of your men, you're safe," soothed the district attorney, "so long as you keep your upper lip stiff. You're just a li'l nervous, that's all, Simon. Nothing to worry you a-tall. Here, have another drink. Rafe, shove the bottle over, will you?"

Rafe Tuckleton pettishly obeyed, muttering under his breath. It was only too painfully obvious that Reelfoot's remarks had upset him, and he didn't care who knew it.

"Look here, Simon," he said suddenly, "you wanna leave right here your notion that you'll snitch if it comes to the squeak."

"I'll think about it," said Simon, setting down his glass deliberately.

"Because," Rafe continued as though there had been no interruption, "you wanna remember it's almost as easy to kill two men as it is one."

"I'd thought of that," said Simon, "and I brought two of my men with me to-night. They're down at the saloon waiting for me now."

"A lot of good they are down there," sneered Rafe.

"But they can do you and Arthur here a lot of harm later—if anything happens."

"Don't you trust us?"

"Not so far as I can throw a calf by the tail," was the candid reply. "I'm goin' now. You fellers scratch your heads over what I've said. I ain't goin' to the pen for anybody and you can stick a pin in that."

WHEN Simon was gone, the district attorney and Rafe sat in silence while a man, had one been so inclined, might have counted three hundred. Neither looked at the other. Rafe fiddled with his glass on the table-top. The district attorney rolled a slow cigaret.

The district attorney was the first to break the silence with, "Simon's got a bad case of nerves."

"We oughtn't to have used him," said Rafe. "First thing you know the tomfool will say or do something we'll all be sorry for. I didn't think he was like that."

"Maybe we'd ought to have told him all of it from the beginning."

"Not that. No, he'd never have gone in it then. He ain't got nerve enough. I'm afraid Reelfoot's days of usefulness to us are over."

"He's done good work in the past."

"The past ain't now. And I tell you, Arthur, if Simon gets any more jumpy than he is now he'll kick the kettle over. You hear me, he'll do it, the pup!"

Rafe allowed the district attorney two full minutes to mull over this, then he continued:

"We gotta get rid of him."

The district attorney looked over at Rafe, his upper lip lifting. "I suppose we gotta."

"We'll work the old game over again."

"Not on your life! We turned it once! And that was one too many."

"We had bad luck, that's all. Just a li'l hard luck. Look here, didn't Simon say either Bill or one of his deputies was always snooping round his ranch? All right, what more do we want? We can fix it so's to get rid of two birds at a clip. And it'll work this trip. We'll do it, all right."

"We'll have to." The district attorney smiled grimly.

Rafe Tuckleton gazed speculatively upon his friend. "How about Tip O'Gorman?"

"Well?"

Rafe came flatly to the point. "How about gettin' rid of him, too?"

But this was going too fast for the district attorney. He shook his head. "No. Too dangerous."

"Now, look here," said Rafe, leaning forward and tapping the district attorney's knee with a persuasive forefinger, "you're forgetting that all this trouble we're having is due to Tip O'Gorman. If it hadn't been for him wanting a 'safe' man, Jack Murray would have been elected and everything about now would be fine as frawg's hair in January."

"Well, we had to give 'em one honest man," said the district attorney cynically. "The voters were getting ideas."

"Rats," snorted Rafe. "What if they were? I don't give a damn what Tip or anybody says, we were strong enough to elect our whole ticket. Huh? No 'maybe' about it. I know. Tip's an old woman, I tell you. He's gettin' too big for his boots. He needs a lesson."

"Who'll give him one?"

"We will."

"No. Not for a minute. I know Tip. I ain't locking horns with that gent."

"Whatcha afraid of? He can't do anything."

"Can't, huh? Aw right, let it go at that. Not any for me, thanks."

Again Rafe's persuasive forefinger came into action. "Say, Tip ain't any grizzly bear, feller. He's only a two-legged man like you and me. He *can* be put where he belongs."

The district attorney remained unconvinced. "I hear you say it."

"Ain't you got any nerve a-tall?"

"Where Tip is concerned, not much," was

the frank reply. "I've seen that man in action."

"Action nothin'.. That's just what's the matter with that man—not enough action. He'll go so far and no farther. He don't want anybody wiped out if he can help it. You saw what a fuss he made over Tom Walton's killing. Lord! he made me sick! You might 'a' thought Tom was a good friend of his. I tell you, Arthur, that sort of squeamishness don't get you anywhere. Nawsir. You gotta go the whole hog or you'll wind up in the calaboose. You bet *I* ain't for any of them half-way plans. It's kill a bull every time or I don't shoot. Tip O'Gorman must go."

"Lessee what Sam Larder and Crafty say," the district attorney offered uneasily.

"No, not them, either of 'em," Rafe declared firmly. "They're friends of Tip's."

"You tell 'em just like you told me," suggested the other. "Maybe you could persuade 'em."

Rafe shook a decided head. "Not a chance. I know them. They're soft and bull-headed where Tip's concerned. They think he's hell on the Wabash, you know that. These three stand together always. No, Arthur, if we shove this deal through we gotta do it alone."

But the district attorney remained dubious. "It's too big an order."

"Not by a jugful it ain't. Gimme the bottle."

Rafe poured out a stiff four fingers. He drank it slowly. Then he had another. His eyes began to gleam redly. Suddenly he stood up and struck the table with his fist.

"I'll show 'em," he exclaimed. "Tip needn't think he can gimme orders! 'Won't let you ship cows if you get your leg over the pole again,' says O'Gorman, Larder and Craft. Just as if I'd done something out of the way instead of tryin' to put one more polecat out of the world. I'll show 'em! Say, Arthur, whatsa matter with buckin' Larder and Craft after we put Tip out of business?"

"Wait till we do," replied the district attorney, who foresaw many difficulties in the proposed operation. "And if you ask me, I don't know how we're going to do it."

Rafe Tuckleton scratched a tousled head. "Jonesy might shoot him cleanin' his gun," he proffered.

"Why don't you do it yourself?"

Rafe showed the requisite amount of contempt for such a foolish question. "It's more'n possible Tip might start cleanin' his own gun about that time. And I *could* spare Jonesy if I had to."

"Jonesy might not want to take the chance. You haven't thought of that, have you?"

Rafe, by way of reply, took another drink. When he set the bottle down, the district attorney picked it up, held it against the daylight, then looked reproachfully at his friend and put the bottle away in the cupboard.

"Tell you what we can do," said Rafe. "We can have Simon do it."

"Simon Reelfoot?"

"Who else. Sure. Why not?"

"You're crazy. Simon may be a fool, but he has more sense than that."

"Simon drinks a skinful sometimes. Ever see him when he gets that way? He acts very rowdy. Yeah. I'm almost certain if, when Simon was under the influence thataway, he was told that Tip had found out about his share in the Walton killing and was making threats against him, that Friend Simon would just naturally hop out and fill Tip full of holes."

"But I thought you were saving Simon for Wingo? The sheriff's more important than Tip just now."

It was evident that the district attorney was becoming more and more worried at the prospect of giving Tip his quietus.

"We'll have to figure out something else for Wingo," said Rafe. Then he brought his open palm down on his knee with a crack like a pistol shot. The district attorney jumped in his chair. "I got it!" cried Rafe. "I got it! It just came to me when you said 'Wingo.' We'll get the three of 'em at one lick."

"I knew I didn't put that bottle away soon enough."

"Rats. My head's clear as a bell—two bells, by Gawd! Listen. We'll get Simon and that foreman of his drunk. We'll sick the pair of 'em on Tip O'Gorman. They'll put the kibosh on Tip, and the word will be passed for the sheriff. He will go to make the arrest and they'll plug him. Being drunk, they'll be desperate and won't care what they do."

"Suppose the deputies go with Bill?"

"We'll have to fix it so they won't. Oh, it'll be natural this time. We'll wait till they're taking somebody over to Hillsville, or gone to make an arrest or something."

"But the sheriff may swear in a posse to help chase 'em."

"There won't be any chase. For a chase you gotta have horses and we'll take away their horses first thing. No, it's a cinch Bill Wingo will go to arrest 'em by his lonesome. He's that kind."

"And we took him for a mark," was the district attorney's bitter remark.

"I didn't," lied Rafe. "I always knowed what he was."

The district attorney did not contradict this statement. Nothing was to be gained by a fight with Rafe Tuckleton at the present time.

March had come in aroaring. Almanacwise it was passing out ableating. Except in the high places the snow was going fast. The frost was coming out of the ground, making it necessary for the Hillsville stage to employ eight horses instead of six. The gray geese were flying northward. Here and there on the southern flanks of the lean hills the grass showed bravely green. That uncomfortable person, Dan Slike, was almost well enough to stand his trial. Spring was in the air, but winter still held sway in the heart of Billy Wingo. He had not been able to make up his difference with Hazel Walton, or rather she had not made up her difference with him. Manlike, or mulelike, whichever you prefer, Billy Wingo was stubbornly determined that the girl should make the first move. True, he had seen her. It was also true that he had gone out of his way to see her. Always his reception had been friendly, but not the least cordial. Obviously she had not forgiven him his outburst.

Whenever he thought on what he was pleased to consider his ill-treatment at her hands, he was prone to rail at the foolishness of women. He did not stop to reflect that there was another side to the shield. Certainly not. The woman was clearly and wholly in the wrong. Adam, I believe, was the first man to express this opinion. His sons have been following his footsteps ever since.

Came a night of heavy rain and wind. Billy Wingo, a lamp on the table at his elbow, was reading a Denver newspaper. A sudden gust drove a spatter of rain across the windows. There was a soft thump followed by a sliding sound against the outside door. Some one uttered in a woman's voice a muffled wail.

Billy went at once to the door and lifted the latch. The wind pushed it back against him and flung a spray of wet into his face. There was something lying on the door-step and sill, something that moved a little. Billy let the door fly open. The something was apparently a woman in distress. Billy bent down, endeavoring to slip his hands under her shoulders. But the woman was heavy and her clothing was very wet and slippery. Billy bent a little lower and—Smash!

"HE'S coming out of it," a voice was saying. "I saw his eyelids flicker."

"You hit him a mite too hard," declared another voice. "Y'oughta used a club instead of that wagon wrench."

"I didn't know how hard his head was," offered a third voice, "and we can't afford to take chances. You know that. Anyhow he's coming along all right, so what's the odds?"

"He's ruined that pillow," complained the first voice. "And I know he's bled on through the sheets into the mattress. Spoil the mattress, that will. Cake the feathers all up. Make 'em nubbly."

"Don't be so dainty, Sam," laughed the second voice. "You're so all-fired fat what's a rough mattress to you? Sleep on the floor and you wouldn't know the difference."

Billy kept his eyes shut, although he was now completely conscious. His head ached like forty. Seemed as if the whole top had come off and dozens of little devils were inside hammering like mad. He believed he knew the owners of those three voices. Sam Larder, Felix Craft and Tip O'Gorman. He opened his eyes. Yes, he was right. There they were, the three of them. But it was daylight, and a day of sunshine too. And the last thing he remembered was a night of wind and rain.

Tip gave back his look with a smile. Sam Larder and Felix Craft did not smile. Their faces were serious.

"Glad to see you're coming round," said Tip O'Gorman. "Here, let me fix that bandage. Looks as if it might be slipping. How you feel—pretty good?"

"Pretty good—considering," replied Billy.

"That's fine, fine. Want a li'l something to eat?"

"Rather have a drink."

The cool water revived him like wine. He lay back on the pillows greatly refreshed. He thought his head ached a little less, perhaps.

"Where am I and how did I get here?"

"You're in my house," said Sam Larder. "You were—uh—brought here."

"After the roof fell on me?" said Billy, fingering the bandage round his head.

"Well, you see," said Tip in some embarrassment, "we knew you wouldn't have accepted our invitation unless you were knocked silly first. But I—I planned the whole thing, Bill—I didn't intend to keep you senseless as long as this. It's a matter of ten hours since you were hit. I didn't know but what maybe we were due to lose you after all."

"That would have been a pity," said Billy.

"Wouldn't it? Yeah. Don't blame me for that crack, though. I told Crafty not to use anything made of iron. But I'm afraid he used his own judgment."

"I always do," said Felix Craft.

"Who was the woman?" inquired Billy.

"That's telling," replied Craft. "It doesn't matter—especially."

"No, it doesn't matter a mite. I was just wonderin'. You fellers went to a lot of trouble to carry me clear out here. I suppose it's too much to hope you were seen doing it."

"I don't guess we were seen," said Tip. "We kind of took care not to be."

"How long do you count on boardin' me, Sam?"

"Just a li'l while," was the reply.

"No longer than is necessary," slipped in Tip, with emphasis on the last word.

"Necessary, huh. *Necessary.* I suppose you fellers think you'll be able to get Dan Slike off by kidnappin' me. You forget there's Riley Tyler."

"We know there's Riley Tyler," said Tip, "like we know Riley and Shotgun went to Hillsville yesterday and won't be back for three-four days. And about Dan Slike we don't care three whoops in hell. To tell you the truth, Bill, I'm surprised you don't know us better than that. *We* three didn't have any hand in that Walton business."

"I didn't really think you did," said Billy frankly, "but knowing how you and Tuckleton——"

"No, no, Bill," interrupted Tip hastily, "don't go fussin' about Rafe. That's a cat with another tail entirely. Your business right now this minute is with us. Our business is with you. Here we are. Here's you."

But Billy was apparently paying no further attention to Tip's words. He was looking at the ceiling. He was smiling. He chuckled.

"Do you know," he said, glancing sidewise at Tip, "when I was a kid, I often wondered how it would feel to be kidnapped. I had a idea it would be romantic sort of. But it ain't, not a mite. I feel like I'd been on a tear—head, y'understand, and mouth all furry and *thirsty!* Where's that pitcher? Oh, I can sit up all right."

He swung up to a sitting position with a lurch. "Here's how," he said, reaching for the pitcher.

He drank his fill and again lay down, supporting his head on a bent elbow.

"Crafty," he said severely, "why for are you monkeying with that gun?"

"I thought I had it hidden behind the table," replied Craft, shamefacedly depositing a six-shooter on the table in front of him.

He folded his arms behind the gun, but Billy noticed that the fingers of his right hand were touching the wood of the butt.

"The truth is," said Tip, "that we intend to watch you pretty closely. But you haven't any kick coming. You ain't gagged or hogtied even."

"Seeing that Sam's house is a mile out of town and a good eight hundred yards west of the Hillsville trail, gaggin' me and tieing me up are hardly necessary. Sam, that water sure gave me a appetite. I feel considerable better. Suppose now you send along the chambermaid with several eggs, more or less, let 'em lay, and two-three-four slices of nice ham, and some fried potatoes, and bread and butter, and a li'l jam if you have it—if not I'll take what you've got handy and some coffee, black, with sugar. Better have her bring a full pot of coffee. And Samuel, my own dear boyhood friend, will you send along the golden-haired chambermaid?"

"That's the way," approved Tip smiling, as Sam Larder slumped kitchenward. "Make a joke of it. No sense in taking it to heart."

"Tip," said Bill, "I always knew you were an old scoundrel."

Tip looked hurt. "The scoundrel perhaps, and only *perhaps*, mind you, but I deny the age. I'm only a short fifty."

"Plenty of time for you to be hung yet," admitted Bill. "Felix, old settler, that gun of yours is pointing right at me. Is it easy on the trigger?"

"Mighty easy," said Felix Craft, altering slightly the angle of the weapon's barrel.

Billy hitched himself up to a sitting position. By means of the bed's two pillows he made himself comfortable against the wall.

"You spoke of some business," he said. "Le's hear it."

Tip cleared his throat. "It ain't much. All we want is for you to leave us alone."

"Seems to me you asked me something like that before," mused Billy.

"And your answer was unsatisfactory."

"What kind of an answer did you expect?"

"We expected you'd be a sensible man, the sort of feller who wouldn't throw down his friends."

"You said that before, too."

Tip nodded. "We still think maybe you can be brought to see our side of it."

"We don't want to do anything we'd all be sorry for," Felix Craft nipped in significantly.

"Hear the clanking chains," said Billy. "The man's threatening me, I do believe."

Craft returned his stare woodenly.

"You see," Tip remarked, "we expect to do a li'l business this year."

"Do you think this will be a good year for business?" Billy cocked a questioning eyebrow.

"We hope so, we hope so," pronounced Tip. "I'll be open with you, Bill. If you keep on nosing into our affairs the way you've started in we'll lose money. Couldn't help but lose it. You didn't take office till the first of January and business won't be done in any volume till well into the year——"

"When the ground is hard," interrupted Billy, "and the volume of business won't be apt to leave tell-tale tracks. I get the innards of your meaning."

"Exactly. So you see how absolutely necessary it is for us to be sure that you won't horn into any of our li'l deals."

"We intend to be sure," declared Craft.

"Tip," said Billy, "that man is threatening me again. You stop him. He makes me nervous. Sometimes I almost think he means it."

"I'm afraid he does mean it," said Tip. "I—we don't want to do you any harm, Bill, physically or otherwise. You understand, that, don't you?"

"Seein' that you keep on tellin' me so over and over, I'll try and believe it. But what I want to know is if you decide finally to do me harm, physically or otherwise, what kind of harm you'll do. Will you drop me over the cliff on a dark and moonlight night and dash my quiverin' body to death on the cruel rocks below, or will you slip a li'l wolf poison into my morning coffee, or will you just cut my throat or what? I'd like to know. Honest I would. My curiosity is standin' on its hind-legs."

"It's no joke," Tip told him seriously.

"Of course it ain't. Who said it was? Not me. I'm serious as lead in your lung. Likewise I'm scared to death. If I was standin' up you'd hear my knees clacking together. Not to disappoint you I'll shake the bed. There! How's that?"

He grinned at them disarmingly. They did not return the grin.

"Might as well tell him now," suggested Craft.

Tip nodded. "I was going to. Bill, you left your office in Golden Bar last night." He paused, looking up at the ceiling.

"You needn't try to make me think you're making it up as you go along," Billy fleered with a wink. "I know better. Flap along, flap along."

"You took your rifle with you and both your guns," resumed Tip. "You went to the stable and saddled your red-and-white pinto and rode out of town."

"Right down Main Street, I suppose, where everybody could see me?"

"Nothing so coarse as that. You were careful to strike into the shelter of the cottonwoods that grow so close to the rear of your corral."

Bill's eyes widened with well-feigned enjoyment. He was reasonably sure he knew what was coming. "I'll bet somebody saw me, alla same."

"Several people saw you, saw you so plainly that they could swear to your identity on the witness-stand."

Billy leaned forward interestedly. "They *could*, but would they?"

"All five of 'em would."

"Five, huh? Don't you think that's a good many folks to have on hand so providentially, a night like last night? Raining and blowing for Gawd's sake, remember? You don't want to override this thing—whatever it is."

Felix Craft laughed sardonically. "We won't. Don't you worry any about that, Bill. We've thought it out pretty average careful."

"That's good. I'd be sorry to see you fellers make any mistakes. Go'n, Tippy, old settler. You've got to where me and my gallant steed are a-skulking in the underbrush with half the town watching us like lynxes. What did I do next?"

"You haven't done it yet. And whether you do it or not all depends on yourself. If you stay stubborn, then this afternoon you'll hold up the Hillsville stage."

"Don't lemme forget myself *too* much. Will I wear a mask?"

"Naturally—and your horse will be seen, your red-and-white pinto that everybody knows. It's something like the trick you worked on Driver and Slike. We listened very careful to your testimony at the hearing. We're grateful to you for the idea, Bill."

Billy tossed away all credit with a wave of his hand. "Oh, you clever fellers would have thought of something just as good. Trust you. Next."

"Everybody on the stage will be able to swear to your clothes and your horse and your guns. One of your guns has a brass guard. That gun especially will be remembered."

"You do think of everything," Bill said in admiration. "But does it sound natural that I'd be using my horse, especially such a conspicuous-lookin' horse as that red-and-white pinto, right where everybody in the stage could see him? Even if I am crazy enough to hold up the stage, you've gotta give me credit for a li'l sense."

"I said there wouldn't be any coarse work," averred Tip. "Your horse will be tied in a li'l patch of woods out of sight of the stage, but just about the time you're lining the passengers up on the trail your horse will bust out of the li'l patch of woods and show himself plain for everybody to take a look at."

"Somebody will have to drive him out. Suppose *he's* seen, too?"

Tip shook a lazy head. "Not him. He won't be seen. It will all look mighty natural like an accident. Somethin' scared the horse, that's all."

"After I've robbed the stage what do I do?"

"There you have me," confessed Tip. "I don't know what you'll do. You might ride away and keep going for several weeks. That would be the sensible thing to do."

"Or I can ride back to Golden Bar and be arrested by my own deputies for stage robbery. I don't suppose anybody would believe it if I said I was kidnaped."

Tip smiled slightly. "They might. You never can tell what people would believe."

Billy drew his knees up to the level of his chin and hugged them.

"No," he drawled, "too fishy. Folks don't kidnap folks nowadays—only in books. Shucks, I'll bet you fellers were counting on just that particular snag in human nature. Looks like you've got me, don't it?"

Tip nodded his head. "Looks like it."

"You've only got yourself to blame," said Felix Craft, studying the gun on the table so handy to his fingers.

"True," acquiesced Billy. "I've only got myself to blame. So what care I for poverty or precious stones? Look here, fellow citizens, who is going to take my part in this stage holdup?"

"I will," said Craft modestly. "I rode your pinto out of town last night and I think I made a good impression. Yeah, I'm sure I did. And I have more than a sneaking idea I can get away with the holdup."

"Don't doubt it," said Billy. "Don't doubt it for a minute. You've got nerve enough, I know that, and we're about of a size. I—uh—I *thought* there was something familiar about that vest you're wearing. And are those my other pants you have on? The table hides 'em so I can't tell for sure."

"They are your other pants, and your coat and hat are hanging on a hook in the kitchen. I had to put your spurs on my boots though. Yours were too small."

"Oh, I'm sorry," mourned Billy, genuine concern in his tone. "If I'd only known—However, suppose some one in the stage puts a hole in your face right over the eye, Felix. Have you thought of that?"

Craft nodded. "We have to take some chances."

"That's so. You've got a sporting spirit after all, Crafty. You'd think running a gambling house so long would have taken it out of you sort of. Might be your ranch has saved you. And suppose I don't feel like having you risk your valuable life, Crafty, what then?"

"Then the deal can be arranged," Tip answered for Craft. "Give us your word, Bill, and you can walk out that door and ride back to Golden Bar right after breakfast. Right now if you don't want to wait."

Billy looked incredulous. "You mean to tell me, Tip, that you'd take my bare word?"

"You're whistling we would," Tip declared heartily. "Everybody knows your word is good."

"I've never broken it yet, but don't you see, once broken, what good is it?"

"But if you give it you wouldn't break it. We know you."

"But if I give my word to you to do this thing I will have broken it—to the territory. When I took office I made oath to obey and uphold the laws. I guess maybe you forgot that."

Tip looked a trifle dashed. "Well—" he began.

"You see," interrupted Billy, "If I broke my word to the territory I'd break it to you likely. Anyway what guarantee have you that I wouldn't?"

"Looks like there was only one trail out," Craft said briefly.

"Gimme something to eat first," Billy implored, rubbing his empty stomach.

"We'll do that much for you," said Tip. "And while you're eatin' you think it over. There's a lot to be said for what we want you to do. Think how easy it is, Bill. Just go a li'l slow is all we want. And think what you get by it—complete freedom otherwise and that ten thousand a year easy money we spoke of a while back. Ten thousand ain't to be sneezed at these days. I dunno where you'd make it any easier."

"Neither do I," Billy admitted frankly.

"You don't want to go to jail now, do you, Bill?" wheedled Tip.

"Sure not," was the prompt answer.

"Of course you don't. And if you decide to accept our offer, Bill, the secret will be left behind right in this room. No one will ever know anything about it. To your friends you will be one of the straightest sheriffs Crocker County ever had. Oh, I know what you're thinking of. You're afraid of what Hazel Walton might think. But——"

"Let's leave her out of this," Bill struck in sharply.

"All right," acquiesced Tip with a slight cough, "we will. Alla same, Bill, who's to ever know what you did?"

"I'd know for one," Billy observed simply. "And suppose I tell somebody? You know I never could keep a secret."

"I told you how it would be, Tip," remarked Craft. "He's too damn honest for any use."

Billy nodded his gratitude. "Felix, I thank you. At least you are a friend of mine."

"You forget me," said the disappointed Tip. "If it hadn't been for the ground-and-lofty talking done by yours truly, you, William, would have already gone where the good Indians go. I can tell you, Felix and Sam are downright disgruntled with you."

"Felix, I take it all back," grieved Billy. "At the first convenient opportunity I shall drop a li'l arsenic in your coffee or a li'l lead pill in your system. I dunno which yet. And that goes for you too, Sam."

"What's that?" queried Sam, entering with a large platter of ham, eggs and potatoes and setting it down on the table. When Bill had explained he smiled grimly. "Yep," said Sam Larder. "You've been a thorn in our well-known side for some time. Trimming you off the parent stem would do you—and us—a heap of good."

"I see," remarked Billy, sliding from the bed and hooking up a chair to the table, "I see that the patient is not yet out of danger. But the doctors have not completely despaired of his life. How about it, Tip? You haven't given me up yet, have you?"

"Bill," said Tip irritably, "you're a fool."

"But not a damn fool," returned Bill with his mouth full. "You'll have to admit there is method in my madness."

"WELL," said Felix Craft, attempting a pleasantry, "how do I look?"

"You look," said Billy, following a meticulous survey of his questioner's attire, "you look like Mr. Felix Craft, our genial gambler and non-resident ranch owner."

"Shucks, I was hoping I'd look like you. I'd sure enjoy making a good appearance. Maybe the mask will make a difference."

"Mask won't disguise your voice any."

"I'll talk like I had a cold. Oh, I won't have any trouble making folks think it's you."

Felix Craft spoke with tremendous confidence. More than the occasion warranted, thought Billy Wingo.

"Why don't you wear my star?" suggested Bill. "Then folks would sure think it was me."

"Too raw, and you know it. Even you wouldn't do a fool thing like that."

"Thanks for the compliment," Billy said humbly. "Supppose now you get plugged, Felix?"

"I won't get plugged. Not me," declared Craft, pulling the six-shooter with the brass trigger guard and making sure that the hammer rested on an empty chamber.

"What makes you think you won't be plugged?" persisted Billy.

Craft darted a quick look at his questioner. "Because I know I won't. I'll have the drop on 'em, don't you see? Nobody will dare cut down on me."

"How do you know they won't?"

"I'm sure, that's all."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Because I am, that's why!" was the snappish reply. Then in a pleasanter tone Craft continued, "Because, Bill, I've figured out my chances carefully. Not once in a thousand times do stage passengers resist a road-agent."

"How about the Wells-Fargo guard?"

"He ain't riding this trip."

"How do you know he ain't?"

"Now don't you worry how we know, Bill. We know, and you can bet on that. It's like I told you, we've figured this thing out to the last li'l detail. We——"

"You bet we have," cut in Tip quickly. "For the last time, Bill, hadn't you better change your mind?"

"I couldn't change it for the last time till I'd changed it at least two other times, Tip," Billy drawled, one-half his brain busy trying to fathom why Tip should have interrupted Craft so bruskly. Tip never did anything without reason. Never. And why was Craft so unnaturally sure that he could hold up the stage without being shot? Unnaturally, exactly. Because Felix Craft was one not given to explaining anything he did. Yet in this instance he had taken the trouble to explain at some length. Why?

Billy tilted back on the rear legs of his chair, cocked his heels up on the table and stared at the ceiling.

"Well, how about it?" Tip demanded impatiently. "You going to be sensible?"

Billy waved a hand for silence and then sang in a whining bobtail bass:

"Barney Bodkin broke his nose;
  Want of money makes us sad;
Without feet we can't have toes;
  Crazy folks are always mad;
A nickel candle's very small;
  Many fiddlers can't play jigs;
One that's dumb can never bawl;
  Pickled pork is made of pigs.

"Ain't that a nice song?" Billy broke off, glancing round him for praise. "Lot of truth in that song, too. Especially that part about crazy folks. They always are mad—like you and Felix, Tip, and our fat friend, Mr. Samuel Larder. Why all the delay, Felix? If you really are gonna be a bold bad man, go'n and be one. Don't dally round here any longer. Suppose you miss the stage? You'd be disappointed. So would I. Because I don't want anything to prevent you from having a fair crack at it. I'd like you to have every chance—but I forgot, you ain't taking any chances, are you? This is a sure thing."

"The Rider of Golden Bar" will be continued in EVERYBODY'S for September.

Perfect Ignition

In Which the Leading Part Is Taken, Not by an Automobile, But by an Interesting Woman All of Us Have Met

By James Ash

IT'S generous of me to tell you about it, George—you who consider all the rest of the world merely a suburb to come to New York from. So far as I can figure out your point of view, the country is just the place underneath the turnips, cows and farmers, and any one who likes to raise flowers and such is either a nice old lady or a fellow who's not enthusiastically masculine and would smoke scented cigarettes if he had a bit more stamina and dash.

Well, anyhow, here's my confession. The other day I met myself coming back, as it were, and I was a lady. To be plain, we had a visit from a friend of Mollie's, who is herself an amateur gardener. I think she brought a husband with her, but I didn't get to see much of him. Don't know how, when or where Mollie picked her up; but I've made up my mind not to have any more sisters.

This youngish matron was of the enthusiastic type—you know, the kind so jammed full of nothing that it keeps exploding. Perfect ignition, no muffler, a gentle down grade and a hurry to get nowhere with every prospect of success. Mollie merely said she was very fond of flowers and I'd like her.

Well, we drove over to Kittanning to meet them and, coming back, this Carbonated Lady sat on the front seat with me. She had begun talking before she waved her hand to Mollie from the station platform and by the time we'd started I was already hypnotized or gassed or something, and had the feeling she'd always been talking to me since before I was born. It was sort of soothing at first, like a motor purring. About the end of the first mile her voice tripped a minute on one word and, honestly, I blamed it on the engine—thought a cylinder had missed.

After that I began trying to hear what she was saying and, sure enough, it was all about flowers. Listening to her was like being blown through a jungle on a greased spiral wind. It seemed to be all one long sentence. I got so lost in it I forgot to put on the gas at the bottom of a hill and, when she suddenly shut down preparatory to noticing we had stopped, before I knew it I said "Period!" right out loud and had to limp out of my mess by revising it to "periodically" and going on from there.

Well, she started again before the car did and all was just as before. Then she got dust in her throat, or something, and one bit of what she was saying got slowed up just enough for me to have time to get its meaning. I got "*adore* sweet peas," and "but mine are never very good till they're two or three years old." That won't mean anything to you, George, for to you sweet peas are probably only a high-class vegetable and just as good one year as another; but it meant a lot to me. It gave me the same kind of jolt you'd get if a man who posed as a Wall-Street expert suddenly spoke of quarterly dividends as falling due every second year. Right there I had her number as a real gardener, and it was zero if you want to be polite; if not, she was just a debt.

The next I remember she and I were in the middle of my garden, and it looked to me as if the flowers were wilting. She seemed to be crazy about me because I was such a good listener, and followed me around the paths anywhere without noticing where she was going or connecting her conversation with anything she saw, if she saw anything.

I tested her by taking her over the same paths twice, and after I'd made sure by escorting her clear out of the garden and leading her around a tree four times, I started out and we made a thorough tour of the whole farm. George, she had to sit down to rest twice, but she went right on telling me about flowers just as if we were still in the garden. We flushed one of Mike Davitt's pigs that had wandered over on to our place, and in making its panicky escape it nearly stepped on her feet, but it only made her shift in the middle of a sentence—which is where she made most of her shifts—from hollylocks to gladioli, and may account for her assigning to the latter the characteristics of a Shasta daisy.

I hadn't said anything so far and was beginning to fear I wasn't holding up my end of the conversation, so when we came to the young orchard I said, "This little plum-tree——"

I was going to tell you she didn't even know she'd been interrupted, but that wouldn't be stating the case. She *hadn't* been interrupted.

Later on, though we were out of the orchard by that time, I tried it again, "This little plum——"

I had only lost ground and it roused my determination. First of all, I knew I must keep calm. George, do you remember how I could always, by some strange throwback from Sunday-school days, recite the names of the twelve minor prophets? Well, I started in doing it—"Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, etc.—" Said them over and over, to myself at first; but she didn't notice when I unconsciously drifted into saying them out loud.

So on we went, my determination about that plum-tree getting harder every minute while I hung on to my back-firing nerves. I led her back for another trip over the farm and she came right along, still talking flowers while I recited the twelve minor prophets. Some duet!

When we reached the hay-field she'd hopped back to the hollyhocks again and was raising some porcelain blue ones—no one else has ever done that, George. I purposely didn't let down all the bars of the gate, and when she was stooping to squeeze through, she almost lost a beat on the hollyhocks and I quickly inserted in clear, ringing tones,

"This little plum-tree had flowers on it——"

"Wasn't that too *sweet!*" continued she, dropping the hollyhocks. "Have you ever noticed that a young fruit tree with its leaves off has a distinct savor of Rostand—'intelligence des fleurs' and all that kind of thing—you've read his book, haven't you? When I first read it I was perfectly *crazy* about columbine and——"

George, "and" is right. If there were ever any need of expanding a language picture of that woman's entire intellectual and spiritual essence into one whole word, that word would be "and."

That failure pretty nearly finished my nerves, and I told the twelve minor prophets they could all go to hell. It almost broke my determination too; but I made up my mind that, if I couldn't inject that whole plum-tree sentence all at once, at least I would work it in piece by piece, if I grew old and died in the attempt.

I concentrated on the next word of my sentence and waited till I could make her climb a stone wall and then, just when she was balancing on top and holding to one of my hands, I pretended to slip, gave my arm a jerk and shot out the word,

"When!"

"Oh, April, I think; but the time doesn't really matter a great deal with heliotrope seed. Isn't it funny how it doesn't matter with some kinds and it makes such a *wonderful* difference with lots and lots and lots of other kinds? I used to wonder, when I first took up gardening——"

"And," George, just some more "and" after that. But I'd added my word. And she'd heard me say it. Of course a word wouldn't count unless I could satisfy myself she had at least heard it. Anybody could have said any number of words any number of times without her hearing it.

That was the trouble when I tried to score on the next word, "it." I said it every time she tripped over anything, or did or met anything that would slow up an ordinary woman a fraction of a second. But I couldn't register. Finally, as we were marching down a narrow lane, I suddenly stepped in front of her, stopped dead in my tracks and said:

"Pardon me—*It.*"

"Oh, did I say 'she?' You just mustn't mind me at all. I *do* love flowers so and I just can't help personifying them in my own thoughts—some of them are so delightfully feminine, aren't they? Like that one—the one I was just talking about. Why, what *was* it? Isn't that too——"

"Hollyhock," said I aimlessly, but I hadn't lost an opportunity by missing my cue, for of course she didn't hear me.

I realized then that I'd have to wait till after lunch. A man can go just so far on an empty stomach.

Mollie had lunch served on the big porch, and the Carbonated Lady had three people she could talk to all at once, and she did. This eased it up a little on me—not much, but enough so I could plan a bit as to how I could finish that sentence and yet be on watch for any unexpected chance that might arise during the meal.

George, I've never been able to figure out how they do it. Lots of them do, of course, but it's uncanny. Eat the meal, yet never stop talking. You know they eat it, for you see them put the food inside; but you never see them chew and you never see them swallow. You know they must have been eating meals right along for years, because there they are. You know they wouldn't eat alone and you know that if they didn't eat alone they were talking. And that's all you do know.

Of course the Carbonated Lady was one of them and never another word of my sentence could I edge in. I tried once or twice, but she never heard me. And every time I said "was" all by itself Mollie tried to catch my eye, and the Carbonated Lady's husband looked uneasy.

Same way all afternoon. I kept saying "was" at intervals and Mollie, knowing a submarine of some kind was at work, kept trying to get me off to one side on various pretexts, but I wouldn't go. I'd have said the husband couldn't have had any nerves left, even if he'd had any when he married her; but toward the end of the day he got so he'd give a little jump every time I said "was." Maybe he wasn't used to more than one person talking at a time.

Same way when we drove them back to the station. But about half-way to Kittanning old Job Foster turned on to the road with a load of logs at the foot of a steep hill. There needn't have been any accident, for there was time for a hard, jolting stop; but the Carbonated Lady complicated matters by opening a door and trying to get out—still talking, though she did change the subject. I put on the brakes all right and tried to restrain her at about the same time, with the result that both of us somehow made a hasty exit from the slewing car.

The grass was thick and high and the ground soft and moist, so everything was done with the greatest comfort, though some abruptness. The Carbonated Lady and I took up our final positions sitting down, facing each other. Mollie kept her head as usual, stayed in the car and was hardly bruised. The husband was so used to not talking that he never made a report; but seemed as comfortable as usual.

Well, George, I got my breath before she did, and with it my presence of mind. We sat there, blankly looking each other in the face for a brief second, and then I scored my victory, all of it:

"Was only two years old!"

She gave a kind of gasp, there was actually still another speechless second and then she burst forth with a cry to husband:

"Oh, oh, oh! Richard, Richard! Mollie's brother's hurt his head. And——"

But she'd heard me, George

Well, that's all. Now admit I'm pretty broad-minded to confess to the seamy side of amateur gardeners. But George, before you start on your "they're all alike" stuff, I want you to note that the Carbonated Lady is strictly a city product, belongs in the city, came from the city and, thank God, went back to the city. She'd be a success in almost any city circle; but her kind doesn't grow in the country.

But the country would do her good, George, if administered with a strong hand. As a first step I'd take her out in the garden, make her sit down on the ground in front of a parsnip and look it in the face all day, day after day for weeks and weeks, all alone with the parsnip. Why a parsnip? Well, why not? But a beet or a carrot or anything else without ears would do. That's the only way you can get the real essence of the country into these hectic, ingrowing city people.

George, I wish I could get you to keep your half-promise to come out here and see what the country is really like. We have lots of vegetables and when one wilts we'll move you over in front of another one, just as long as we have any left at all. It would do you good, George.

The Tale of a Villein

Bran the Jester Plays a Hidden but Telling Part in the Tortuous Processes of Medieval Graft

By H. C. Bailey

Author of "Call Mr. Fortune," "Barry Leroy," "The Highwayman," etc.

THERE was a new king in England and a new queen, and since no man could think of one to set against him, no man denied him. This also was strange and new, a change of kings without a fight. Through the weary country Henry II and his Eleanor made a progress and the barons gave them homage and feasts. So they came to the castle of Sir Gilbert du Marais in Risborough under the hills.

Sir Gilbert was lavish. He had sweet herbs on his floor and Flemish tapestries on his walls, and good yew-colored cloth upon his chairs, and footstools covered in fur, and his beds were made with sheets of silk and sendal and there was even a table-cloth at his dinner. His dinners were furnished with cranes and peacocks and swans, with spiced and seasoned meats in great plenty, with white powder and large sweetmeats and mulberry wine and piment and clary and clove wine. Musicians and mummers he had in abundance. He provided a merry, pretty niece, Adela, to divert the king. He was himself assiduously gallant to the queen. He had an air, he had still a presence, he had never lacked wit. Sir Gilbert succeeded with his king and queen.

But Bran the king's fool was not merry in Risborough and on a day when the dinner in its length surpassed all the other dinners, King Henry (of whom his enemies said that he would sin every other sin but gluttony, and his friends that he would do anything for them but eat) King Henry, I say, remarked this fool spurning a dish of field fares as he sat apart sewing. "Why, brother, what woman's work is that?" quoth the king.

"It is my shroud, Henry."

"God save you, fool, why a shroud?"

"Because I am old, brother, old, and the spirit is gone out of me. Here is a new king and a new queen, yea, and a new castle and a new lord in it. But the new is what the old was and the spring as the winter and there is no more hope. Hush you, brother, I stitch me my shroud."

The king bit his finger and fidgeted, but in a moment pretty Adela at his elbow engaged him, and when the mummers came Bran slunk out and no one saw him go.

It was in his nature to seek the hills and along the ridge he rode looking out through the beechwoods over the wide blue green of the vale and singing to himself, sometimes in English, a babbling child's song, more often the Latin of the Magnificat. A ludicrous creature indeed, in his piebald clothes, his jingling cock's comb, his ass's ears, chanting "for He that is mighty hath magnified me and holy is His name." He was aware of it, he ended in giggling laughter. "An old song, brother. Yea, yea, and an old fool. And the world is old and hearts are cold and only the wicked dare be bold. God have mercy, brother, so it has been all your days. And the new is but the old, and new Sir Gilbert is but old Sir Thief. Yea, yea, and new King Henry is but the barons' king of old. And the weak must go hide in the old, old hills." So he rode on droning and in a while when the sun was waning level with the ridge and the shadows in the wood darkened he came suddenly upon smoke and a little township of huts.

Children scurried away from his horse like rabbits. Women rose from the ground to stare at him and cried out. Through the smoke which rose from great mounds men came to meet him sooty and glistening with sweat. "God save all in this place," said Bran.

They looked at him under gathered brows, women and men. "Who are you that come here?" a man asked.

"A child of this earth, brother."

They thought it over; then solemnly, "That is a lie you have said."

"Nenny, nenny. A man of these hills, I. Child of the chalk."

The man strode forward, "I say you are a vain liar. 'Nenny, nenny,'" he mimicked Bran. "That is a Frenchman's bleat."

"Yea, wise man. And I will talk to you in French of the North and French of the South, in vile Flemish and godly Latin. Yet English is my tongue and my blood and my bones are English."

"Who then? And what do you make on our hills?"

"I am one Bran, a fool by nature and grace, brother. And I am here on the chalk hills to dwell a while with what is mine."

"Go your ways. Here is naught that is yours."

Bran came down from his horse. "Yea, brother, yea," he grinned and shuffled in the beech mast, "all this is mine and the white chalk under that made my bones. Why are you unkind to me, brother?"

"You are a Frenchman and some French lord's hound."

"A hound, I! Hear him!" he barked grotesquely. "God mend your wits, brother. Do I look a hound?" and he showed off his ungainliness and grimaced and some of them began to grin. "Holy thorn, who are you that you call me French?"

"We be good Saxon folk and we want no Norman dogs to spy on us."

And Bran laughed: "I tell you a tale that was told to me, an old tale, brother, a new tale. The sheep, he hated the wolf, which came a stranger to eat him. Then said the grass to the sheep: 'Nay, brother I was here before you, but you eat me.' But the good chalk said 'I was here when the world was made, when the Lord God set the land apart from the sea, but goody grass eats of me. Who is the sheep, brother? Good Saxon folk. And your Norman lords be the wolves. But I, I am the very chalk of the hills. The Norman came from over the sea, from over the sea the Saxon came, King Brut brought Britons from over the sea, my folk were here when the Britons came. Little folk, old folk, folk of the white chalk hill. We were here at the birth of things, we shall watch their death."

They drew nearer him and one of the women said, "He is a fairyman."

"He is a liar," the man laughed.

"I love you, brother," Bran said. "You are English stuff. Nay, but I tell you true. My mother was of the little folk. Have you any left, brother? Or have you harried them all, you Saxon and Norman men?"

"He is a fairyman," the woman said. "Good friend, the hills are empty. There are no more little people. When the sad years came they fled away."

"Yea, yea. So it was said of old. So it shall be said anew. But always the little people come again. Even as I. I am of them by my mother, and my father no man knows but God. My mother, she was speared by a huntsman of old Hugo d'Oilly's, Ivo his name, and they took me, a child, to make them sport."

They looked at each other. "It rings true, friend," the man said. "Such a man Ivo there was and an evil man. And he is dead unshriven."

"That well I know," Bran said. "Now know you me, brother. But God have mercy, I know not you."

"We be folk out of Watlington."

Bran looked from one to the other. Even for country folk they were rudely clad, barefoot, bareheaded, in tunics and kirtles of coarsest cloth and that old and ragged: the signs of hard living were branded on body and face.

"Men say there be fish which fly," said Bran, "but who heard ever of townsmen living wild in the hills?"

"You are a stranger who have not heard it, fellow," the man said. "No man holds his home in our England."

"No horse has a tail, said mine when I docked him. Tell the tale of your tail, brother."

"We be villeins of Watlington, and so were our folk before us, holding our housen our own for dues and service to our lord.

But King Stephen gave the manor to Sir Gilbert du Marais. Then Sir Gilbert built him a castle in Watlington, where castle had never been, and to build it he pulled down our housen and we have no home nor living."

"The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests. Yet I have none, brother."

"Like outlaws we live and like outlaws we die."

"Godric!" the woman said and touched his hand.

"So it is. Are you one of us, brother?" the man's eyes were grave and hard.

"I am the world's fool, brother," Bran said.

"By St. Dunstan, if you abide with us you are fool indeed. You are welcome to the nothing we have." He turned on his heel and called sharply to the other men and took them back to their charcoal burning. And Bran unsaddled and tethered his horse where in an open glade there was grazing and came back to the huts, and everything he did the women watched as it were a miracle. He sat himself down cross-legged and began to cut out of an elder twig a whistle that he could play upon. And as he cut he thought. But the woman who had called him a fairy came so close that he must needs look up at her: "Yea, yea. I have no fear to handle iron. And I will eat your salt and your baked bread," he laughed. "I am no fairy, I. Good faith, I have dwelt too long with men."

"I—I thought no ill," the woman said. She was a comely creature, something worn by hard living, but tall and finely made and of a gentle face.

Bran looked up into her blue eyes: "How are you called, maid?"

She blushed and he knew that a maid she was and not without thought of whom she should wed: "I am Godiva," she said.

Then he surprised her again: "These men of yours, are they all craftsmen?"

"Surely, yes, one and all."

"And who is their leader?"

Again she blushed: "It is Godric. He is a joiner, the best joiner in all our hundred."

"The Lord loves a good craftsman. But God have mercy, the world is wide. Why not go seek fortune? Why lurk here?"

"We love our own land," she said proudly, "we wait for our rights again."

Bran blew a horrid discord upon his whistle, "English!" he said "Oh English every way!" and he sprang up and marched off playing weird music.

Now of all things in the world Bran loved a good craftsman and what roused his passions (I conceive) in this matter was not the bare wrong and cruelty, but that craftsmen should be cast out of their shops and their skill lie waste while they toiled at rude work, burning charcoal for meager livelihood. He was not loving Sir Gilbert du Marais before. But this it was which determined him to hate. An odd thing to choose, yet every man has his own abominations and this was Bran's. And he applied his mind to Sir Gilbert. A castle in Risborough, a new castle in Watlington—"Yea, yea, the wicked flourish like a green bay tree. And now he will be lord of all the hills. It is well planned of Gilbert. And that hold at Watlington is shrewdly set against the king's castle at Wallingford. Yea, yea, Gilbert is wise in his generation," and stranger and stranger the music grew.

When Bran came back to the huts, he found pots steaming over the fire. He flung down a brace of hares. "The fool pays his shot, brother."

"God help you, fool," Godric tossed them swiftly out of sight. "If Eudo saw you, you are sped."

"And who is friend Eudo?"

"Gilbert's forester. And such a one as Ivo was that killed your mother."

"Yea, yea," says Bran mildly, "and in their death they shall not be divided. Be easy, brother, no man sees Bran when Bran would not be seen. And here is what friend Eudo may see and say naught." He had made his cloak into a bag. He put it down and showed a heap of truffles. They caused more consternation. "How, in God's name?" quoth Godric.

"Where the beeches grow, there grow truffles," Bran shrugged.

So they made a savory meal and when they began to be genial, "What is this Eudo, brother, that you love him so?" Bran said. "Hath he harried you?" He produced a silence. Godric consigned Eudo to the devil and Godiva drew near and touched him. The others looked at each other and from one another to Godric and were glum. "Fie, fie, never fear the man," Bran said.

Then Godric swore. "I fear him not,

fellow," he roared. And again there was silence.

Across the firelight Bran darted his glances hither and thither. Each man was communing with himself. Only Godiva looked into Godric's face as she pressed against him. He held his head high, staring into the darkness of the woods. It was a heavy face and sullen, not a clever man's face, but of a frank courage that redeemed it.

"Godric! You will not go!" the woman said.

"I do not fear him."

"Nay, but fear for us."

"It is that. It is hard. I do fear for you," said Godric and turned away from her.

Then one of the bent brooding men lifted up his head and said: "What strikes one strikes all," and there was rumbling and muttering.

"Sooth, sooth," Bran nodded. "But who strikes here?"

Godric turned on him and said fiercely: "Eudo, fool."

"Friend Eudo, who is the forester of friend Gilbert?" Bran thrust out his leg and stirred Godric's bulk. "Tell on, brother."

The tale was this: A while before Eudo had bidden Godric to his cottage to talk with him of their leaving the woods, desiring as he said to make their peace with his master, of which talk nothing came, Godric swearing that in the woods they would stay till they had their rights again and Eudo shaking a dark head over him. Then came word that Eudo charged Godric with stealing a silver horn of his, the rich gift of his lord Gilbert and in due and lawful order Godric was summoned to answer the charge before the moot court.

"If I go I am sped," said Godric, "for he will make the court of Gilbert's people. If I go not we are all sped, for he will make me outlaw and hunt me and all that harbor me."

"When is your moot court to be, brother?"

"In the dawn."

"And by to-morrow's night you may be outlaw and nailed to a tree. It is well planned of Gilbert. I see one way, brother. Gird and go. The land is wide and craftsmen need never lack meat."

"By the cross, I will not go," Godric thundered. "I will stand for my right."

"Aye, aye, stand," the others answered him.

"Your rights be more than your life?" Bran laughed. "Oh English, English! Then I see another way, brother: meet your court. As bad as men are they will not do that in council which one man will plot alone. When they gather, shame comes with them. Go to court with all your folk and have all told and sworn. I think he does not love the light, our Gilbert. He is too wise."

Godric stared at him. "I thought you false," he growled. "You have said what a true man should say. To the court I will go." He thrust out his big hard hand and took Bran's.

"Godric, Godric," the woman clutched at him. "This is a fool's word. It is to go to your death. There is another way, Godric. Here we rest safe. Hide here in the hills."

"You are no friend to me," Godric said and she cried.

ON THE low green hill which stands out from the great hills into the vale, the folk of the manor were met. Over against it the new castle of Watlington glimmered white in the dawn. Robert, the steward of the manor, a big sleek man, came in the pomp of his gold chain and furred gown between two men-at-arms and with him was William the town reeve and after him marched the richer folk and the priest Clement.

"What like is this priest, brother?" said Bran in Godric's ear.

"The man is gentle and to all kindly, but no firm friend."

Then Bran stole away from him and as the great ones ordered their seats on the turf he whispered in the priest's ear in Latin the words of Pilate. " 'Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him,' " and he slid away so swiftly in the throng that the priest could not be sure who spoke. He was much troubled and showed so plain signs of it that the steward asked what ailed him, but he only shook his head and crossed himself.

The steward's eyes following his saw him watching anxiously Godric where he stood among his friends, and could find nothing strange there. But then he saw Bran sitting by them, red-and-green motley conspicuous against their gloom.

Bran stared at him twiddling thumbs. "Now he wonders. Now he is unsure." Bran advised himself. "It is a shrewd one."

But the steward now seemed not to see him and rose in measured dignity and declared that the moot court of the manor of Watlington was met and asked if all were men of the manor.

"Nenny, nenny, brother." Bran shook his head with a jingle of bells.

"Then get you gone, good fool," the steward laughed.

"Why, good steward, is this not England? English am I and a freeman and Bran is my name. What has your court to do that a freeman may not hear?"

A moment of silence owned that a bewildering blow. "Now God have mercy, this is a fool indeed," says the steward in a hurry. "Whose man are you, sirrah?"

"My mother's, sir steward."

"What brought you here?"

"My mother, in faith."

"Hold your peace in God's name," the steward cried and turned to the reeve and conferred, and the reeve bade Eudo the forester and Godric the joiner come into court. They stood together, Eudo in Lincoln green, a swart, squat, wide man, and Godric in dingy doublet, tall and fair. The reeve declared the charge, that Godric came to Eudo's cottage and talked with him and the while stole his silver horn which Eudo presently missed and guessing the thief, went to Godric's hut and searching there, found the horn. To all which Eudo made oath. Then Godric swore that he had never stolen nor handled the horn and that if Eudo found it in his hut Eudo himself put it there. Whereat the two men turned to call each other liar and the steward had much ado to stay them. "You, Godric," says he at last, "this is a wild tale you tell. Why should this honest man do a villainy and forswear himself to work you wrong? Who shall believe it?"

"Why was I driven out into the woods, steward? Because one sought my house and my land. Why seek my life now? Because——"

"This is no answer, fellow," says the steward loudly. "Answer to the charge. By my faith, you have enough to answer."

"Here are men of the manor will answer for me," Godric said, and one after another his company came forward to be his compurgators, to swear "By God, the oath of Godric is clean and true."

"Well. But you be all villeins," the steward said. "And Eudo that has sworn against you is a freeman. His oath is good against your oaths."

Bran sprang up. "Yea, yea, it is in some sort a court, fellows," he said loud enough for all to hear. "But there is a tale in my head, a tale of goodman Naboth and the lord Ahab which craved Naboth's garden-ground. So this lord Ahab, he sent men to swear goodman Naboth a rogue and——"

"What knave speaks there?" the steward started up. "I mark you, fool."

"Do so, good steward."

"Who put this naughty wantonness on your tongue?"

Bran crossed himself. "Holy writ!" he cried. "God save him, he knows not holy writ," and with uplifted hands of horror he drew away, but always he watched the steward keenly. "Now would he give his shrunken soul to know what is behind me," he smiled, "now he has met fear. Always you stand my friend, brother Fear."

The steward had much to fear from his court and they no little from him. "Yea, yea, now you sweat," Bran said. "Many voices there be, brother, and in you more than one."

But at last they made out to agree and the steward wiped his brow and sat in silence a while, staring at the ground, and then he rose and said: "We commit you to God, Eudo and Godric, we commit you to God. The oaths stand equal and we know not. Godric, you are charged and you are not cleared. Now must you go to the judgment of God. How say you?"

"Be God my judge," Godric said and he turned upon Eudo. "Aye, God shall judge between you and me."

"It is you to stand the ordeal," Eudo growled.

"Godric the joiner goes to the ordeal by iron," the steward announced and sat down heavily, and the priest and the reeve with others to help went to make ready.

NOW what men believed of the ordeal was that by it God showed the truth in a dark case, that water would not drown nor fire burn a man of a clean heart. The manner of the ordeal by iron was that a pound's weight of iron was heated red and placed on the hand of him who must carry it three paces. Then his hand was bound up and the bandages sealed and in the morning the priest broke the seal and looked at the flesh. If there was no burn the man was proved innocent, if there was a blister as large as a walnut, God had declared him guilty. This all simple men faithfully believed, and subtle men like Robert the steward found it a useful faith.

So the reeve and his men brought a brazier and swung it till the charcoal was glowing white and the priest brought from his church the sacred iron and said a prayer over it and laid in in the heat. And the while Godric washed his hands in a bucket of spring water and his friends wished him a good deliverance, Bran was scrabbling with his knife in the chalk of the hill.

The priest came and took Godric's right hand upon his and felt it and looked at it. "This hand is the man's bare flesh," he said aloud. "God deliver you, my son."

Bran nodded his head. "Amen, amen, my father," he said and in Latin: " 'I am innocent of the blood of this just person. See you to it.' "

The priest flinched and looked all about him and at Bran, but Bran was playing with the chalk, making strange signs on the turf, and the priest went back to his place hanging his head.

Then they made a space in the midst and Godric's friends drew apart, giving him words of cheer, and last of all went Bran and as he went he grasped Godric's hand. "Neither wonder nor look, brother," he whispered. "God's earth for man's need," and he left upon the hand a paste of chalk mud.

But Godric stood there alone looking at his hand. "Come, sirrah, come," the steward cried. "You have offered yourself to the ordeal. You shall not deny it now."

Godric strode forward where the priest stood by the brazier and thrust his hand into the priest's face, but the priest would not look at him; the priest was trembling so that his robes shook and the tongs clattered on the brazier. He lifted the red pound of iron, "Swift oh my son, swift," he said and it shook as he held it poised. "The open hand and swift, oh swift for your soul." He slid it on to the palm. "Once twice, thrice," he cried as the steam rose from the hand, and Godric strode out three steps and let the iron fall.

"The dog never gave tongue," said the reeve to the steward.

"Peace, peace. They are a stanch breed," the steward muttered, but he plucked at his chin.

Already the priest was binding up the hand. He set his seal on the bandage. "I pray for you, my son," he said, "and you too pray."

The steward stood up. "Fail not on the morrow, Godric," he cried. "Or at your peril fail."

"Who fails, I fail not," Godric said and scowled at Eudo.

Then they went their several ways and as he went Robert, the steward, always a provident man, bade two fellows watch the fool and see with whom he went and whither. But the fool was gone already and none had seen him go. So the steward, seeking safety still, wrote a letter to Sir Gilbert in Risborough saying that the matter was tangled, for Godric had come boldly into court, and the court had been hard to drive and strange folk watched it, so that he could do no more than put Godric to the ordeal, whereof he hoped a good issue.

The while Bran sat in Watlington church and when the priest came in to vespers, out of the half light Bran plucked at his gown. The priest cried out.

"Fie, fie, what should a priest fear but God?" said Bran.

"In the name of God, what is it that you are?" the priest shrank from him.

"The man that I am, he goes for naught; but that I work with strength is wrought, and that I seek by the wise is sought. Twice I have spoken and you have heard, now I bring you another word," and he fell to chanting Latin out of the Magnificat: " 'He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble and meek.' Sir Priest! Here be six silver pennies. These for your prayers for Godric, a true man. And when his hour comes see to it that you find him clean."

"All saints grant it!" said the priest.

"Be sure they will, father. Be very sure." Bran's hand gripped his shoulder a moment, Bran peered close into his face and flitted out and away.

He was in the woods of the high hills as the moon rose, wandering down a glade and sometimes capering in a queer dance and as he went he sang, music that had no words to it or words of no language that men still spoke, soft eery music. After a while there rose up among the silvered boles of the beechwood, as though he came out of the ground, a man still shorter than Bran and slighter, a very dwarf, but shapely, like a boy with a man's bearded head. He was clothed in a deer skin and about his head was a wreath of yew. He breathed through his nostrils. "You are not of our folk," he said, speaking English like a foreigner, "you who sing the song."

Bran sat down cross-legged where fungus grew and plucked one and squeezed the juice into his mouth and sucked it.

"You are free of the woods."

"Yea, yea, I was free born. And still there are little people, brother?"

"The little people are always and always."

"Good life, brother."

"And to you brother. Come, we have ewe's milk and mare's milk a plenty."

"Na, na. I ask help. Away under the hill of the white cross there abides one, a king of the house folk, a red man and round with eyes that swell and he hunts all the day."

"He is seen."

"There be those could lead that king's horse a long hunt far away from his company."

The little man laughed. "It could be, brother."

"And when he was far and alone, this might be given." He held out a scrap of parchment folded and sealed. But the little man stepped aside. "Na, na, it is no magic but good magic. It is a kindly charm, a merciful charm, for the life of a good man."

The little man came very close and touched Bran and nuzzled against him. "Yea," he said smelling, "yea," and took the parchment and tied it in his deer skin.

When Godric woke in the morning, in the dark, he saw the fire still burning bright and, coming out of his hut in wonder, he stumbled over the body of Bran who lay sleeping in the warmth. Bran waked with a grunt alert: "God save my ribs, brother. Is your hand as sound as your foot?"

"I thought you had left me," Godric said. "I was well pleased. I do not like your tricks."

"Mislike me and need me, that is for you. Brother, God speed you, mine is to do. Have you slept brother?"

Godric glowered at him. "It is true I have slept. And it is true the hand has no hurt in it. But it was a trick that you played."

"Oh, Englishman," Bran laughed.

WITH the dawn they came again to the hill of the moot court and when all were met Godric was called out into the midst and the priest came to break the bandage. The dried chalk came away with it. He looked at the hand, he felt it. He turned to Robert the steward: "This hand is whole," he said. "This man has borne the ordeal and there is no spot on him."

"Name of God! Fellow, hold up your hand," the reeve cried, and in the morning light Godric held it high.

Heads drew together and there was a murmur of talk, but the steward plucked at his chin. Then he whispered to the reeve and the reeve stole away to Eudo.

"I stand here for judgment," Godric cried.

The steward bade him be silent and solemnly conferred with his court. And then Eudo strode forward. "I challenge Godric the villein to combat," he shouted.

He brought silence then. He was a man proven false by the ordeal. He should have been silent and shamed. He had no right left.

"Who speaks?" said the steward gravely. "It is Eudo that speaks. What is your claim, Eudo?"

"This Godric stands to it that I am false and a thief. I will make good upon his body. That is my claim," and he flung down his forester's leather glove.

"Stand, man, stand," Bran hissed as Godric started forward. But Godric picked up the glove.

"He takes your challenge, Eudo. You are answered," the steward smiled. "By the saints, a bold fellow and sure. Nay, then, we may not deny him. You go to the ordeal of combat."

Then Bran laughed "God have mercy, is this a court? Is this England? By the thorn, you have strange customs in this manor."

"We suffer no fools, fellow. Who sent you to brawl here?"

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"If that you knew, what were to do?" quoth Bran.

Now the ordeal of combat was this. It was fought with consecrated weapons, wooden weapons, like a battle-ax tipped with horn, such weapons as men used in the old time before the working of metals was known. A man could scarce be killed, not easily wounded, but he might be beaten to the ground or wearied out with bruises and the man who fell, the man who gave up the fight, was adjudged craven and infamous.

So with their wooden weapons the two fell on and fought fiercely and fast and Godric had something the advantage, for though the forester was strong and stubborn, Godric had a longer reach than he. And the forester still sought to fight close and Godric kept him off and the blows fell about his dark head. Bruised and dripping sweat he flagged but still held on till desperate he plucked out his knife in his left hand and hurling himself in, though the wood rang upon his head, he stabbed Godric in the neck and fell upon him. He struggled to his feet and reeled but stood.

The steward started up in a hurry. "Hold, hold. We judge him vanquished. Eudo is proven true man and Godric is craven."

But Bran flung himself upon the forester and wrenched up the hand which was fumbling to put away the knife and held it with the bloody knife in it aloft in the sun. "The steel! He has used the steel. He is false and dastard."

That shattered the court. Men cried out "The steel! The steel!" and broke from their places all talking together.

Bran fell down on his knees by Godric and began to bind about his neck the bandage which had held his hand and to him came the priest.

The steward was calling hither and thither, commanding, cajoling, trying to make order, but Godric's folk gathered threatening about Eudo and the reeve and his men ran to back him and all the court was in turmoil.

The priest rose and came into the midst holding up his hands. "It is a true word," he said, and they hushed to hear him. "He has been stricken with steel. Eudo the forester has used steel," and he turned on Eudo and in a quavering voice cursed him with the curse of the church.

"Name of God! priest, you are mad," the steward cried. "We have judged."

"Here is no judgment nor right, but a great wickedness," the priest said, and there were loud voices for him.

"We will examine the thing, we will examine it," the steward said. "We will hold them both in ward till we have the truth of it."

"Yea, yea, till Godric is done to death," Bran said.

The steward shot a glance at him and from him to the reeve.

The priest threw his robe over Godric. "Hold Eudo, you hold a man accursed. Godric you do not hold. He is in sanctuary."

"Sanctuary!" the steward cried. "You are no sanctuary, priest. This is against all law and good custom. What, do you brave my lord's justice?"

"This man committed himself to God and a false, foul blow was stricken. God's man he is and I claim him in the name of God. All Christian men stand for the right."

The steward looked at the surge of the crowd. "You claim him. You shall answer for him," he said and drew off with dignity, and men took Godric up to bear him to the priest's house. But as he was following some fellows laid hands on Bran and hustled him off in the midst of them.

He made no struggle nor cried out. He praised their haste and laughed. They bore him to the reeve and the reeve cursed him for a brawler and urged them on and still he laughed. They carried him to the new castle at Watlington and he was presently brought before the steward.

"I have you by the heels now rogue," the steward said. "Now save your skin if you can."

"Of your skin and my skin, mine I would be in," Bran laughed.

"Folly will not serve you now, fool. Who sent you to brave me in my court?"

"If it was not my mother, I know of none other."

"What, fellow, you do boast yourself a masterless man?"

"Nay, good man my fellow, every man has his master, on the earth, or above the earth, or under the earth. Choose you while time is."

"Who is your lord, then?"

"When he does his will, you shall have your fill." Bran crossed himself. "God have mercy upon your soul."

So for some while the steward wrought with him and could make no more of him, and rage compounding with fear, flung him into a cell of little ease and wrote an anxious letter to Sir Gilbert, telling of the perverse way the thing had gone and protesting it was all the fault of this cunning fool whom he held prisoner and who would speak nothing but dark words, and confessing fears of the people, fears the priest was suborned, fears that the fool worked for some enemy of his lord. Which letter came to Sir Gilbert in Risborough in the midst of dancing, and for all that his buxom niece was dancing for the king, the king's eye fell on him and marked his face and the king leaned forward to watch him.

He thrust the letter into his bosom and his face was at work. The king plucked at Queen Eleanor's gown, "There is one who reads riddles," he whispered.

She looked. "He is a stricken man," she said.

"That is the riddle," the king said, and he called out,

"What, Gilbert, ill news?"

Gilbert started. "Pardon, sir. Aye, ill news it is. My foster-brother who is dear to me lies sick to death."

"That touches the heart. Where lies he?"

"Sir, in Watlington."

"No further?" the king smiled. "Nay, man, take horse and go."

"Oh, sir, if you give me leave, I will be with you again in a day." Gilbert knelt and kissed his hand.

He was hardly gone before the king led the queen away. "His brother lies in Watlington. Aye, and in Risborough Gilbert lies," he chuckled to himself. "I will see these brethren betimes."

For that morning when they roused a stag in the woods towards Hampden, the king's mare ran a line of her own, and at first the king was well content, for he heard the hounds clear before him though he never saw them and thought the rest of the hunt were left or away on a false scent. But when he had ridden far and never had a sight of hounds, though always and still he heard them, he tried to turn the mare. She put her head up and bolted and he could not hold her; a queer uncanny thing, for it was not in her temper and she had been going hard and long and was failing. And then on a sudden she checked and stood a beaten horse, heaving and trembling. "God's body, my wench, are you bewitched?" the king said and gentled her and again tried to turn her. But turn she would not. She trembled the more and whinnied and the king was aware that there was no sound in the woods but her whinnying and panting.

A tiny man in a deerskin rose out of a hollow. The mare whinnied again and thrust her wet head into his bosom and he put his hand on her nostrils and she stood still. "King?" he said and laughed. And the king crossed himself. "King?" he said again.

"I am the king."

"Have." He held out Bran's parchment. The king crossed himself again and took it. And the little man laughed and was lost in the beechmast.

"In the name of God and the Mother of God!" the king muttered and gingerly unfolded the parchment. And then he laughed that short sudden laugh of his, for he knew the hand. Bran had written in Latin: "Henry my brother, if you love your fool come seek a sad sorry fool in Watlington where Sir Gilbert hath built him a great new castle to chain king and king's men."

It was a meek and weary mare that carried King Henry back to Risborough and the ride was long for the man who bit at his hands and muttered as he rode. But when he came to Risborough he had a merry brow, for Sir Gilbert's courtiers' anxieties and the queen's jests on the king who lost the hunt. He had not been in Risborough half an hour before one of his knights was gone to Wallingford with an order that the Angevin men-at-arms in the royal castle there should move instantly on Watlington. Then he gave himself, like a jolly dupe still, to the pleasures of Gilbert's providing.

WHEN Gilbert came to Watlington in the night and heard all that the steward had to tell, he was an angry man. It was plain to him that the steward had mishandled the affair vilely and that he set the blame on Bran and made a mystery of him only to cover his own folly. So he cursed the steward roundly for disturbing him and went to bed. But in the morning early the steward stood by his bedside. "Sir, will you speak with the fellow?"

"The devil burn you, did you wake me for that? The fellow is but a wandering, brawling fool."

"Will you look from the window," my lord?"

Sir Gilbert looked out and saw a company of men-at-arms halted a bowshot from the castle. "Whose are these spears, in God's name?"

"My lord, I think this brawling fool could tell us if he would."

"Send out, man, and see. And for the fool, have him up and I will make short with him."

But Bran was hardly dragged from his hungry cell before those Angevin spears were moving up the castle mound and their trumpets sounded at the gate and bade open it in the king's name, and Sir Gilbert looked down from his walls and saw the king.

File after file the lances passed through the gate and halted in their troops in the courtyard. Last rode the king, and Gilbert came to him, bare-headed, smiling delicately.

"What, Gilbert!" the king said. "And how lies your brother this morning?"

"Oh my lord, you honor me to come to this poor hold."

"Not for your honor but mine am I come. God's body! man, this place is a great strong castle. It is not in my mind that a castle stands here."

Gilbert began to talk. It was built for the safety of his lands and his people who had been much harried and——

"Where is my fool, Gilbert? Who harries him?" The king swung down from his horse. "Enough of lies. I will have the truth of your work here if I hew it out of your heart. Go in, sirrah, go in. Louis and Thibaut, follow me."

So into the hall they went and there, very much at his ease sitting in the great chair plaiting rushes, while Gilbert's men huddled aloof, was Bran, "Welcome, brother," he said. "Are you too prisoner? Oh, he is a wise fellow, this Gilbert. But greedy, God warn us, greedy."

"Who holds you prisoner?" the king cried, and turned on Gilbert.

"Nay, my lord, nay. It is a folly of my steward's. I——"

"Nay, my lord, nay. It is a wise steward and a wise Gilbert. Listen lord. One builds him a castle on poor men's housen and land. And the other harries these same poor men," and he told the tale of the two moot courts and the two ordeals and Godric's wound.

"God's body! here is no law nor justice nor right," the king cried.

"Nenny, nenny, naught but wise men's wisdom, brother."

"My lord, my lord," Gilbert cried, "this is but a matter of some villeins' quarrels and——"

"Villeins! By the rood, I will have no man lack justice, villein or lord, in my England."

"Ah, my lord, that is a true king's word. But in this matter the fool knows not what he says. He mistakes, he is a dreamer——"

The king stamped his foot: "These stones, are they in his dreams? This castle stands here with no right nor law. You lie to me, Gilbert, and like a fool you lie. I will take order with you! Lay hands on him, Thibaut. God's body! no lord shall build him a castle against me and my people but I will pluck it down to bury him."

"My lord, my lord, I have held my lands these ten years and——"

"What you hold of right of king or villein you shall hold. For the rest you pay a dear reckoning, Gilbert. Have him away."

"So the little man found him a king, brother," Bran laughed. "Yea, yea, the little people have found a king at last," and he touched the king's hand and turned away.

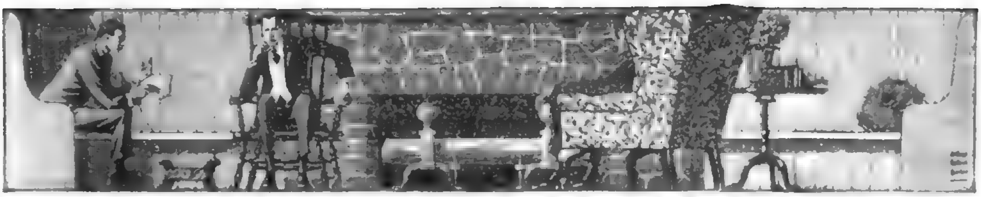
"Whither now, man?"

"To church, brother."

"God have mercy, when did my fool turn pious?"

"In the new world, brother."

And to Godric where he lay in the priest's house by the church he came singing the Magnificat. " 'He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich He hath sent empty away.' "



Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

STRANGELY enough it usually follows that the man who would be successful as a writer or in any of the creative arts must or does suffer from poverty. Back in 1837, to mention only one instance, we find Hawthorne complaining to his friend, Horatio Bridge, that at best he did not see his way clear to make more than three hundred dollars a year at his writings.

Only the other day, a well-known periodical advertised that it was paying more for the serial rights in a certain novel than had ever been paid before. This must have meant that the author received at least thirty thousand dollars from that publication alone, to which sum will be added, doubtless, book and motion-picture royalties running into five figures. Perhaps fifty thousand dollars for a year's work. And Hawthorne, whose name, whose work endures, received only three hundred dollars. Which of these authors has contributed most to the world? Which name will be known longest? When Hawthorne complained of his miserable earnings, his friend, Bridge, replied:

> What of it? you can, with economy, live upon that, though it will be a tight squeeze. You have no family dependent upon you, and why should you borrow trouble? . . . It seems to me that you never look at the bright side with any hope or confidence. It is not the philosophy to make one happy.

BRIDGE raises an age-old question here: Does one do his best work when struggling against adversity or when living in ease and comfort? We should like to hear from readers and authors on this question; we should like to hear conclusions based upon experience. A. A. Milne, whose unusual mystery story, "The Red House Murder," begins in this issue, says that in his first year at writing he made one hundred dollars; the second year he made six hundred dollars and he adds, proudly, "and lived on it." The third year he made one thousand dollars. This economic discipline seems to have had none but good effect upon Mr. Milne, though we are sure many readers and authors would like to know the details as to how he lived on six hundred dollars a year; they would like to know how he made up his budget. Milne battled against discouragements other than those due to poverty; his family urged on him schoolmastering or a government civil service career. But this was not to be. He writes:

> One evening, when I and another boy were looking at a copy of a Cambridge undergraduate paper—*The Granta*—which had come down to the school [Westminster], he said solemnly, "*You* ought to edit that some day." So I said, equally solemnly, "I will." This sounds like the story of the model boy who became a millionaire; I apologize for it; but it really did happen. I went to Cambridge—in spite of the fact that everybody meant me to go to Oxford—and edited *The Granta*. I left Cambridge and went to London to write. In the third year I was by way of making $1000, for several papers were now getting used to me, but in February, 1906, a surprising thing happened: The editor of *Punch* retired, the assistant-editor became editor, and I was offered the assistant editorship. I accepted, and feeling rich and important, told the policeman's wife [he had been renting two cheap and dirty rooms from her] that I should be leaving at the end of the month. I was assistant-editor of *Punch* until the end of 1914. During that time I wrote a weekly article signed A. A. M., and published three volumes of these articles, and one volume—"Happy Days in America." This last came out in 1915 when I was in the army. One American critic ended up a review of it with these delightful words: "Mr. Milne is

> now in the trenches facing the German bullets, so this will probably be his last book." But it wasn't. I have had to disappoint him.

While in the army Mr. Milne wrote a story which was acted by his wife and his colonel's children. There followed a novel, "Once On a Time," and his first two plays, "Warzel Flummery," "Belinda," which was produced here by Ethel Barrymore and "Mr. Pim Passes By," which ran nearly all last season in New York.

LEONARD HATCH, whose story, "The Sunny Side of Nineteen," appears on page twenty-three, is a New Englander, who confesses "I remain one no matter where I happen to be." Mr. Hatch is an author new to EVERYBODY'S readers, so we'll let him introduce himself:

> Whenever I'm asked to tell something of myself and my doings, I'm always filled with humiliation at the number of diversified experiences I haven't had—experiences so indispensable to the modern literary luminary. As a boy I never licked any other boy twice as big as myself, nor did I ever seriously contemplate running away from home. I was never a sailor before the mast, nor a cow-puncher. I never swung a bungstarter, nor polished the brass-work in a Bowery saloon. I was never a coal miner, a roustabout, a hack-driver, or a ham actor; but then again, I never addressed a woman's club on the Keynote of the Modern Novel or about Tennyson's influence upon O. Henry. I never lived alone in an isolated hut amid the woodland creatures and the silent hills; I never—but why prolong this list of the exhilarating experiences I haven't had?
>
> Since 1918 I have divided my time between writing advertising copy and other things. Indeed, at present I am doing precisely that at Trenton, New Jersey, and incidentally wondering how General G. Washington could possibly have found time during his short stay in Trenton to have sat in so many chairs. Speaking of advertising, the more I come in contact with it, the more respect I have for it—its vitality, its crisp expressiveness, and the conscientious effort devoted to it. If you happen to define "genius" as "the infinite capacity for taking pains," surely it is hard to dodge the suspicion that there are more geniuses among American copy writers and lay-out men than among American novelists. Moreover, American advertising is rarely as dull as American fiction frequently is.

LET the politicians go to the hot place appointed for them, and swing only a fountain pen. This is the advice given to William Bullock, by his brother, Shan F. Bullock, the Irish author, and perhaps explains why we have "The Hereditary Punch" which appears on page seventy-nine. Mr. Bullock writes:

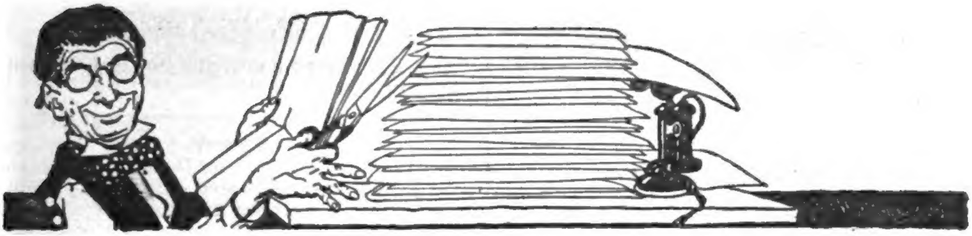
> I've been an iceman, a dry-goods clerk, a newspaperman, a statistician, and a politician. I had the choice when I was seventeen of the United States or South Africa. I chose Chicago — why, I can't tell. I peddled ice and clerked there, going nights to school. I was a cub reporter, I turned out some Irish sketches; came to New York and was dramatic critic of the New York *Press* for six seasons, and wearied of Broadway's petty shams. I got called down by my boss for paragraphing J. M. Synge; I drew four hundred words of abuse on a postal-card from George Bernard Shaw. I wrote a novel and the publisher went bankrupt. I took to blood-and-thunder fiction and went broke.

Then Mr. Bullock went to work for the city of New York as an auditor of accounts in the Department of Finance. "I spent my time," he says, "knocking the efficiency bunk on the head and myself out of a job." He planned writing once more, but that same day Tammany Hall offered him the job of running the Bureau of City Inquiry to fight John Purroy Mitchel, just then become mayor. Mr. Bullock continues:

> I didn't know Tammany Hall then. I was vehemently and solemnly assured of a new and spotless coat on the Tiger. I fought Mitchel in the public prints for four years; I lodged complaints with the district attorney and indicted his false friends. I wound up with a four-hundred-thousand-dollar libel suit against him. Al Smith, our late, lamented Governor and Tammany's lingering hope for President of these United States, used to put his arm around my neck. I know Charles Francis Murphy, Tammany chief, better than any man in New York; I know him better than he knows himself. The night of his greatest victory as leader, when he had every office in the city in his vest pocket, the said Charley Murphy had to be told who I was—I haven't bothered Friend Murphy since. If there's one thing I truly regret, it's my part in making Hylan mayor of the top-hole city on earth. I know him, too.

In the last campaign Mr. Bullock was vice-president of a Harding Democratic League, though he admits he thinks Woodrow Wilson the greatest man of his generation. He goes on:

> I'm against prohibition; I'm for national independence and individual independence as well. I believe without reservation in my fellow man; I trust human nature and am not cheated once in ten times. I'm for the fellow that plays the game; I ask and give only one bond—a man's word. In one way and another, in New York City and in Washington, it has been pounded into me what a reeking stinkpot politics is; to every young man thinking himself politically wise I say, "DON'T!" Further than that, I don't know; only I mosey along and hope Oliver Cromwell was right when he opined those travel farthest who don't know where they are going.



Prose or Worse *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

In a Philadelphia milliner's window: "*Wanted—Girls to Trim Rough Sailors.*"

On a factory, New York: "*Wanted—Women to sew buttons on the fourth floor.*"

On Grand Avenue, Chicago: "*Dr. La Piana.*" (*He could probably keep your organs in perfect tune.*)

On Halsted Street, Chicago: "*Rubber Babies' Pants.*" (*For bouncing boys, of course.*)

On movie theatre in Chicago: "*Why Men Tempt Women on Saturday Night at Popular Prices.*"

In window of dry-goods store in Chicago: "*Slightly Irregular Ladies' 25-cent hose, 15 cents.*"

In Waterloo, Iowa, restaurant: "*Chicken à la Rier.*" (You *remember the piece that went over the fence last?*)

(*From a Pennsylrania paper*)

Housekeeper for a widower—Lady with husband living need not apply. Address ——, Tunnelhill, Pa.

Two's company.

(*La Crosse Tribune*)

The Episcopal ladies will hold their "shower" at the home of Mrs. G. A. Leak on Monday evening.

Come prepared to defy the elements.

(*Fashions of the Hour*)

A mere nothing of pink chiffon and lace, and that nothing divided, leaves a *je ne sais quoi* of ineffable charm.

Zatso?

(*Wellsville, Kansas, Globe*)

As far as can be learned there is not a full dress suit in Wellsville. But a number of the business men, and some of the younger crowd are seriously considering buying Tuxedos, half brothers to the full dress suit. Several who would like to have and wear these suits have agreed to buy one if as many as fifteen or twenty others will buy at the same time. To further the good cause a local merchant has agreed to let the buyers have them at cost, if a considerable number will join in ordering. There are many advantages to the Tuxedo, which can be used at informal as well as at most formal occasions, and which will answer for a good Sunday suit.

Then again, with or without overalls, their open facade makes them deliciously cool as gardening apparel.

(*Los Angeles Examiner*)

WANTED—Inexperienced girl for easy folding.

After a certain age they just won't shut up.

(*Eklton, Maryland, Whig*)

James B. Price has taken the Farmers' Hotel and has engaged the services of Joseph Hemphill, whose reputation as a hostler is unsurpassed.

His filly mignons are sure scrumptious.

(*Lawrence, Michigan, Times*)

Henry Weaver of Grand Junction was trimming a tree over a pig-pen; he fell off a branch on a pig and killed it, breaking both legs. This frightened a colt which jumped a fence, running into a clothesline fastened to a post which was hurled through the air, striking a cow and killed her. The colt ran into a barbed-wire fence and was so badly cut it will die. When the veterinarian arrived to attend to the colt he ran over Mr. Weaver's dog and killed it.

Yes, yes, go on!

(*Wilson County, Kansas, Citizen*)

Fairview schoolhouse is being remodeled and made modern in every way. It is thought now that they will get a globe and they already have a dictionary. A few dollars spent judiciously along these lines will probably stop the young folks leaving the farm.

Sure, get a combination doormat and pen-wiper, and you'd think "old home week" had started.

Copyright, 1921, by Gridley Adams.

(*Los Angeles Times*)

A costly racing launch burned after being beached on Catalina; the engineer was scorched and suffered at a lonely spot.

Always a tender place.

(*La Crosse Tribune*)

Reedsburg Couple Surprised by their Neighbors.

Reedsburg, Wisconsin—(Special)—A son was born on Monday, October 2, to Prof. and Mrs. John Lund.

As old Honi Soit used to say—

(*Advertisement in Chicago Tribune*)

Wanted to rent, a room. What can you offer a young man besides a "mere furnished room?"

I got á lot of ribbons he can run through his nightie.

(*La Grange Citizen*)

Mr. and Mrs. W. T. Simpson entertained a number of friends at bridge last Saturday evening. Howard Lipsey figured up the scores at the close of the play. Mrs. Howard Lipsey won the ladies' prize. Howard Lipsey won the gentlemen's prize.

Well, it was his turn to keep score, wasn't it?

(*Oklahoma City Free Pointer*)

LOST—Yellow half dachshund dog; answers to name of Rover.

LOST—One-half poodle dog.

Well, what's the use of keeping the other halves?

(*Prophetstown Echo*)

Mrs. R. B. Smith is in Tampico this week with relatives and R. B. is alone, looking after his own affairs as he pleases with no one to interfere with him.

Not knocking the Mrs., oh, no!

(*Palm Beach Post*)

Mrs. William Lowe Rise and her daughters, Elise and Mildred, were in Colonial costumes with powdered figs.

To evidence the fact that their genealogical tree can be traced back to Mother Eve.

(*Zanesville, Ohio, Times-Recorder*)

Miss Mayite Collins has sued John L. Nelson at Columbus for $5,000 damages as the result of an accident on the bathing-beach toboggan at Buckeye Lake last July. Miss Collins says she picked up a splinter while sliding down the toboggan, severely wounding her dignity.

Whew!

(*Great Western Employees' Magazine*)

Bathing alone will not keep you clean.

No, it's always more cheerful to have some one with you.

(*Boulder, Colorado, Camera*)

Harry Pratt returned to Denver this morning after a visit with his fiancée, Miss Katherine McKensie. He is receiving treatment for one of his eyes.

Katheract?

(*Omaha Bee*)

More ladies wanted for decorating pillows at home. Experience unnecessary.

Of course not; it's in their blood.

(*Chicago Tribune*)

"WANTED—Young lady as clerk in dry-goods store. Experience essential but not necessary."

Boy, see if you can find Noah Webster's name in the phone book.

(*Quincy, Illinois, Herald*)

WANTED—Pleasant room in private family or rooming house; by a young business woman, with comfortable heat; strictly confidential.

Some Y. B. W. I know are absolutely frigid.

Why Some Editors and Proof-Readers Lose Their Jobs:

(*Niota, Tenn. News*)—F. E. Johnson spent Sunday night with Mrs. E. A. Matheny.

(*Mason City Globe-Gazette*)—R. C. Hunt is the proud father of a nine-and-a-half-pound girl. Mrs. Howe and daughter are getting along nicely.

(*Streator, Illinois, Independent-Times*)—Miss Anna Southey and babies arrived in the city from Chicago last evening for a few days' visit with her parents.

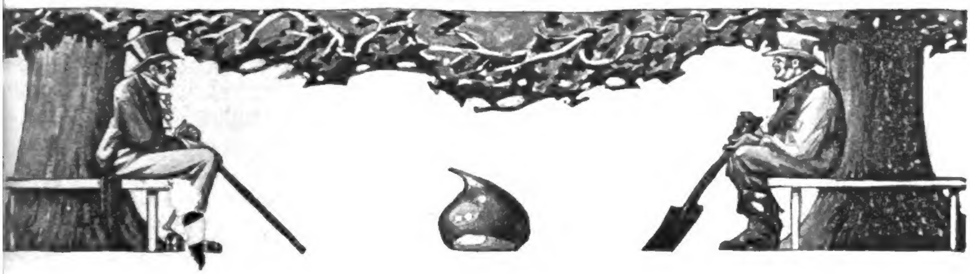
(*Keokuk, Iowa, Constitution-Democrat*)—Through error it was stated that Mrs. Henry Wierather entertained the Belmont Cosmopolitan Physic Club Jan. 13. It should have read Belmont Cosmopolitan Civic club.

(*University of Chicago Magazine*)—The marriage is announced of Miss Bertha May Wood Riley of the class of 1913 to Dr. Helen Ellsworth Ewing (Ph. D. 1911, Cornell University).

(*Cleveland News*)—They were married last June. They have no children.

(*St. Paul Pioneer-Press*)—Woman's Clubs Boost Carnival. Members of Fourth District Federation Promise 100 Chaperons for Dances. Plan for Baby Week.

(*Altoona Times*)—Miss Irene Shaw, the well-known nurse of Hollidaysburg, is attending Mrs. J. Davis of 129 Crawford Avenue, who gave birth to a young son on Wednesday at 2:30 P.M. Mother and son are getting along fine. It was "some" entertainment that was offered, there being several highly unusual features.



Everybody's Chestnut Tree

Editor's Note: Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped, addressed envelope.

TWO old salts who had spent most of heir lives on fishing-smacks had an argu-ient as to which was the better mathe-iatician. Finally the captain of the ship roposed a problem which each would try o work out:

"If you sold one hundred and twenty-six ounds of cod-fish at six cents a pound, how nuch would you make?"

The two fellows worked a while and ieither seemed to get very far. At last old Bill turned to the captain.

"Is it cod-fish they caught?" he demanded

"Yep," said the captain.

"Darn it all!" said Bill. "No wonder I ouldn't get an answer. I've been figuring n shad all the time."

N THE 1904 election, George, a Kansas lruggist, bet heavily that Roosevelt would arry Missouri. Missouri, at that time, was egarded as part and parcel of the "solid South," and the wager provided consider-able amusement for his fellow townsmen. The amusement turned to admiration after lection, however, when the results showed he State in the Republican column.

But a friend of George's refused to credit his prophetic power and insisted that he tell where he had got the tip. At last George confessed.

"To tell the truth, Jim," he said, "I was drunk that night and thought I was betting on Iowa."

THE well-known actor, Lionel Barrymore, is very intolerant of any one who can not speak in accordance with the best literary standards. It is told of him that a stranger once accosted him at a club with this query: "Beg pardon, sir, but could you tell me if there is a man who goes to this club who has one eye named John Parker?" Barrymore looked thoughtful for a moment, then replied, "I don't believe I could help you. Do you know the name of his other eye?"

THREE ladies were discussing the recent marriage of a well-known actress. "You know it is said that before she accepted him she made a full confession of all the indiscretions of her life."

"What touching confidence," sighed one lady.

"What needless trouble," added another.

"What a wonderful memory," finished the third.

THEY were getting up a ball game in a small town and lacked one player. They finally persuaded an old fellow to fill in, although he said he had never played before. He went to the bat and the first ball pitched he knocked over the fence. Every one stood and watched the ball, even the batter. Excitedly they told him to run. "Shucks!" he said, "what's the use of running, I'll buy you another ball."

MR. BROWN sent a Japanese boy to tell Mrs. Brown to hurry or they would miss the theatre train.

The Japanese went as he was bid.

Mrs. Brown was in the throes of putting the finishing touches to her evening toilette.

"Go tell Mr. Brown to hold his horses for a moment," she snapped.

"Well, what did she say?" demanded Mr. Brown when the Jap returned.

"Miss Brown she say 'Whoa!' " came the bland reply.

BOBBY, five years old, passed by a cemetery on his way home from school. One day there happened to be a military funeral in progress there. Bobby climbed up on the cemetery wall and watched the solemn rites and listened to the firing of the salute over the grave.

When he reached home he breathlessly related to his mother the wonderful and interesting sight he had just seen. "But," he ended, "he wasn't quite dead, so the soldiers all took a shot at him."

AN EARLY morning customer, a young woman with a determined air, addressed the salesman at an optician's shop.

"I want to get a pair of eyeglasses of extra magnifying power. While visiting in the country I made a very painful blunder which I never want to repeat."

"Indeed! Mistook a stranger for an acquaintance?"

"No, not exactly that; I mistook a bumble-bee for a blackberry."

THE old negress who washed for Mrs. Worth came one morning with a tale of woe calculated to bring pity to the hardest heart. "Cheer up, aunty," consoled Mrs. Worth. "There's no use worrying."

But aunty held other views of the matter.

"How come dere's no use worryin'?" she demanded. "When de good Lawd send me tribulation He done 'spect me to tribulate, ain't He?"

"**MAMA**, was I ever baptized?" Dwight asked his mother.

"Yes, dear."

"Well, mama, was I ever vaccinated?"

"Yes, dear."

"Well, mama, which one was it that I got in the arm?"

ONE night "Smiling Dick" Carney, a pr fessional turf gambler, had a dream. Th air was thick with hats. Headgear of every description floated about in disordere profusion. The following afternoon, o arrival at the race-track, the first name o the day's list of entries was Hatteras. I was a four-to-one shot, and Carney investe heavily on the tip.

The race started. Hatteras trailed slightly at the quarter. He was neck and nec with the leader at the half. He passed th three-quarter post half a length ahead Then the entire bunch thundered down th home stretch past the exultant gambler Carney was some distance from the post an could not determine the winner.

In a moment the result was announced

"Sombrero wins!"

"**PAPER**, Mister? All about the fair?"

The cowboy, leaning on the fair-ground fence, half-asleep, paid no attention.

"Mornin' Her-ruld! Doncha wanta rea about the fair?"

"Kid," intoned the cowboy, opening on eye almost one-half of one per cent., "d I look—as if I'd—missed anything?"

"**HERE**, what d'you call this?" stormed th irate old gentleman. "Beef or mutton?"

"Carn't yer tell th' difference?" asked th waitress haughtily.

"No!"

"Then why worry about it?"

THE local Shakespeare club was givin its annual performance. An ambitiou amateur of considerable social prominenc had been entrusted with a part calling fo a speech of only four words: "The quee has swooned." As he stepped forwar gorgeously costumed, his friends applaude loudly. Bowing his thanks, he faced th king and said, in a very high-pitche voice, "The swoon has queened." Th audience tittered. He flushed and tri again:

"The sween has quooned." The audience howled, and the stage-manag whispered in a voice which could be hear all over the house, "Come off, you fool!"

But the heroic amateur refused to su render, and in a rasping falsetto, as he wa assisted off the stage, he screamed, "Th quoon has sweened."